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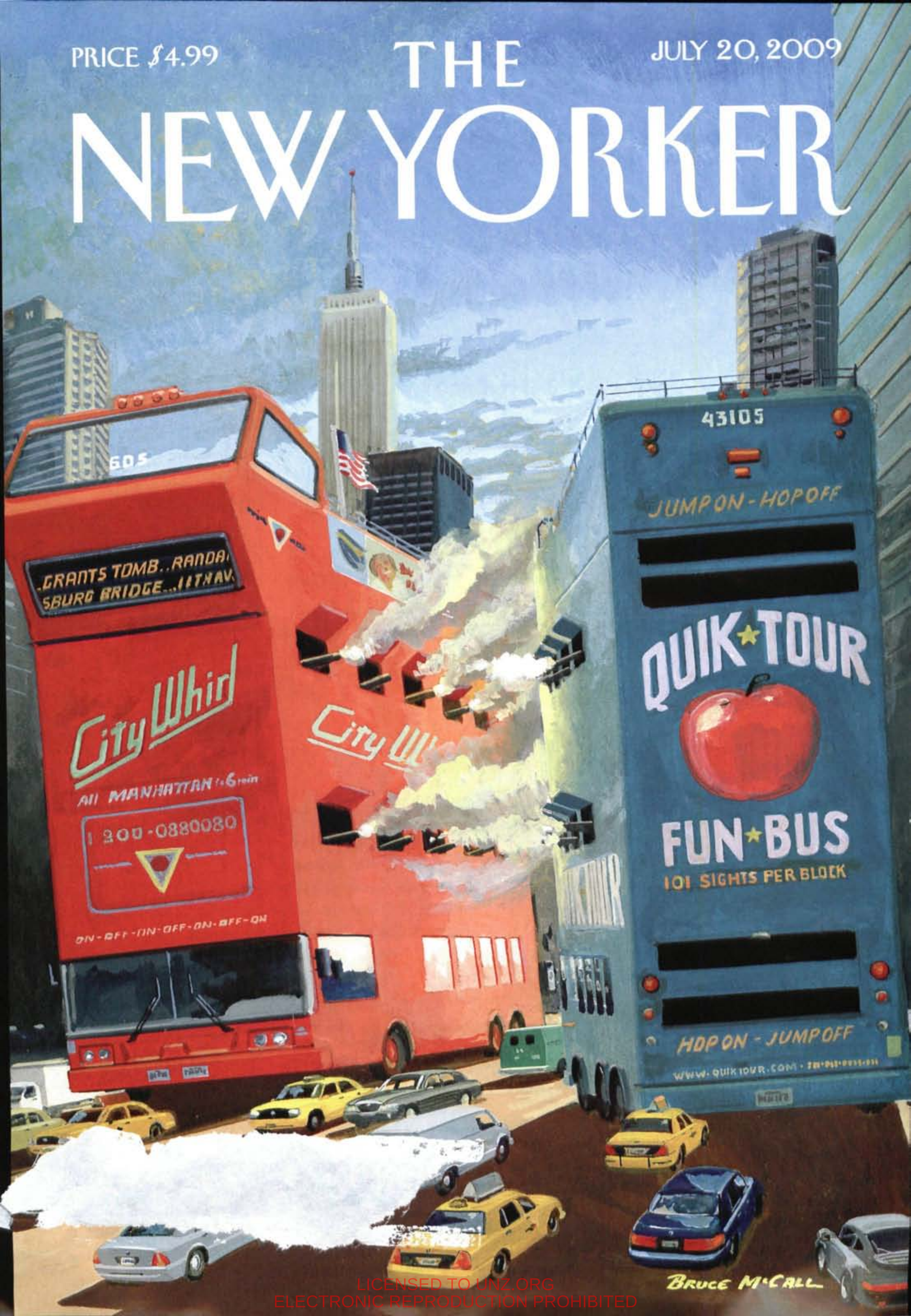
THE NEW YORKER

JULY 20, 2009



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THE NEW YORKER

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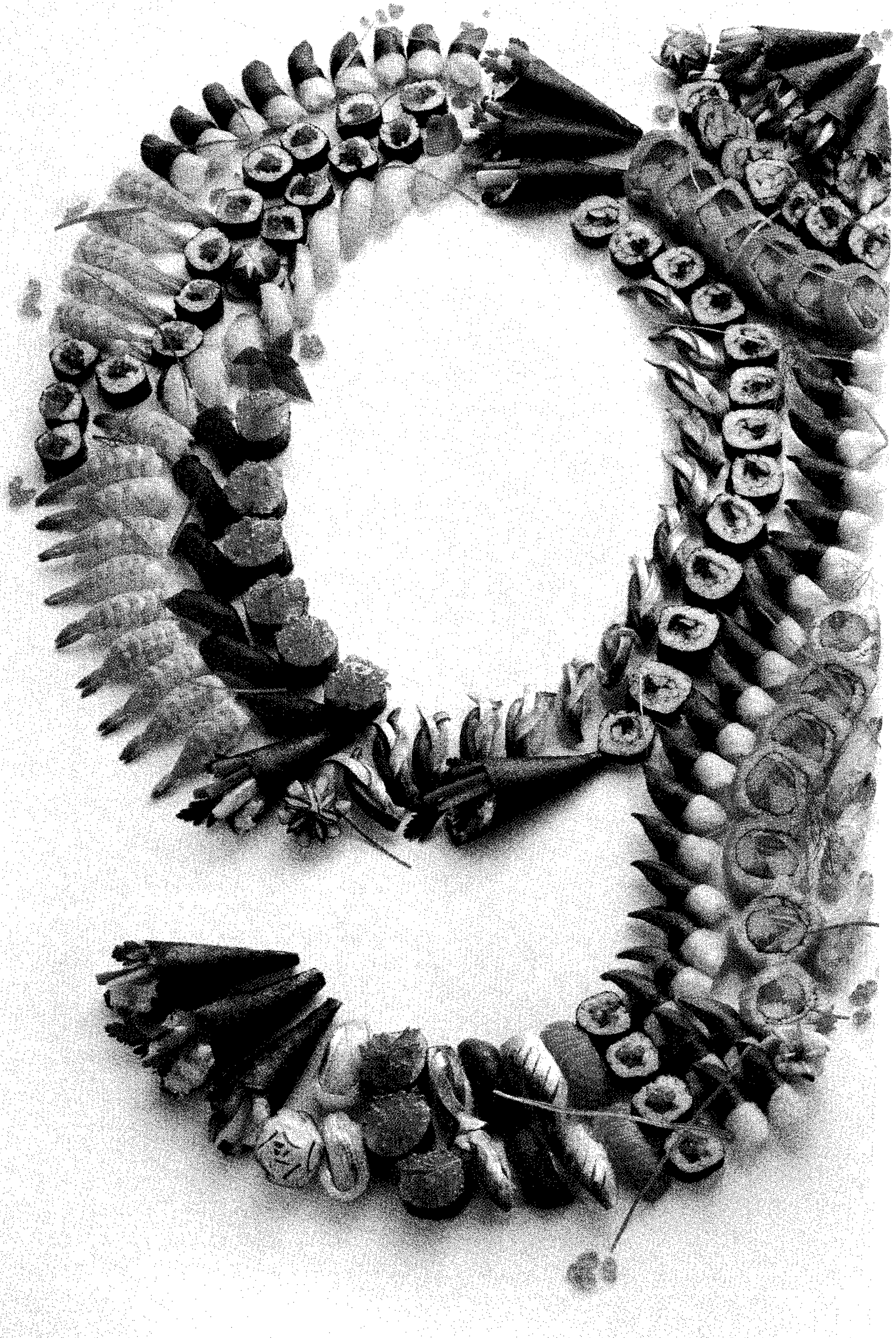

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Colapinto ("Enter Laughing," p. 28), a staff writer, has published two books, "As Nature Made Him" and the novel "About the Author."

Ian Frazier (The Talk of the Town, p. 26; Shouts & Murmurs, p. 35) is a longtime contributor. His book of essays "Lamentations of the Father" came out in paperback in May.

Paul Rudnick ("Fun with Nuns," p. 37) will publish "I Shudder: And Other Reactions to Life, Death, and New Jersey," a collection of stories and essays, in September.

Donald Hall (Poem, p. 46) was the United States Poet Laureate for 2006-07. His latest book, "Unpacking the Boxes: A Memoir of a Life in Poetry," comes out in paperback in September.

Oliver Sacks (The Talk of the Town, p. 27) is a University Artist and a professor of neurology and psychiatry at Columbia University. His "Nova" program "Musical Minds" recently aired on PBS.

Bruce McCall (Cover), a regular contributor of art and humor pieces, has published eight books, including "All Meat Looks Like South America" and "Marveltown."

William Finnegan ("Sheriff Joe," p. 42) is a staff writer. His books include "A Complicated War" and "Cold New World."

Evan Osnos ("The Forbidden Zone," p. 54) reports from China for the magazine, and writes the blog Letter from China, on newyorker.com.

William Styron (Fiction, p. 62), a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, died in 2006. A new collection of short fiction, "The Suicide Run: Five Tales of the Marine Corps," will be published in October.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Books, p. 73) is a staff writer. Her book "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change" is available in paperback.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 70) has reviewed films for *The New Yorker* since 1993.

Meghan O'Rourke (Poem, p. 74) is the culture critic for *Slate* and a poetry editor of *The Paris Review*. "Halflife" is her first collection of poetry.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 78), the magazine's senior theatre critic and the author of "Honky Tonk Parade," is working on a book about Tennessee Williams.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *David Remnick*, *Hendrik Hertzberg*, and *Dorothy Wickenden* discuss Sarah Palin; *Paul Rudnick* talks about nuns; *David Bezmozgis* reads a Sergei Dovlatov story on the monthly fiction podcast. / Video: *Jorge Colombo's* iPhone sketches; *Richard Brody's* DVD of the week. / Ask the Author: *Elizabeth Kolbert* takes questions about obesity. / Blogs: *Evan Osnos* on China, *Amy Davidson* and *Avi Zenilman* on the day's news, *Macy Halford* on books, plus the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

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THE MAIL

CLASSROOM WRITING

Louis Menand, in his review of Mark McGurl's "The Program Era," mentions certain economic factors in the rise of creative-writing programs, but neglects to address the role of the publishing industry (A Critic at Large, June 8th & 15th). The days of editors like Maxwell Perkins shepherding talented young writers through their early years are long over. With publishing houses now expected to turn profits of around fifteen per cent, as opposed to the three to four per cent of Perkins's day, what editor can afford to give a latter-day F. Scott Fitzgerald the devotion, time, and professional advice needed to hone his talents? Creative-writing programs have stepped in to fill this void by teaching young writers, in effect, to be their own editors—an essential skill in the current publishing climate. A good creative-writing program will aim at making students better editors by requiring them to read intensively, exhaustively, and endlessly—and to read far more than one another's work. Reading a novel with an eye toward writing one is a very different task from reading a novel with an eye toward writing a term paper on it, or reviewing it for a magazine, or giving a lecture on the text, and so on. Once the teaching of creative writing is reconceived in these terms—which is to say, as a way to help young writers learn to read in a different way—the task of creative-writing classes becomes far more concrete and, perhaps, plausible. The aim of these programs, then, should be not so much to produce novelists or poets as to produce more astute readers of novels and poetry—which is to say, better editors.

Allyson Stack
Edinburgh, Scotland

The good thing about the rise of writing programs as described in Menand's article is that they have become the modern-day equivalent of the old W.P.A. Federal Writers' Project—they give writers jobs. In a day of collapsing magazines and vanishing newspapers, that is no small benefit. The downside is that writing has been sucked into the credential madness that permeates our society—where everyone from dental hygienists to tree trimmers has to be certified. This phenomenon totally ignores the vast store of untapped—and uncertified—creativity, expertise, and old-fashioned wisdom that resides in the population at large. There are many creative writers out there, who, because of job or family responsibilities, will never get the coveted M.F.A., and will thus never be a part of the magic circle of creative-writing instructors and their students, which defines contemporary American writing. That is a loss for all of us.

Randy Cunningham
Cleveland, Ohio

Menand's piece struck a chord in me that is still twanging, for I was one of those Second World War veterans who came home and rode the G.I. Bill to exhaustion. I found myself in the newly established creative-writing program at the University of Denver, founded by the critic and publisher Alan Swallow. I recall my time there as the most intense of my life—more so than fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. The program produced no Robert Lowells or Ernest Hemingways, but, for me, it was a chance to live with talented and passionate people. I did become a "published poet," although I wound up teaching playwriting (also impossible) at Carnegie Mellon's theatre school, where my classes were petri dishes of emotions and produced no Arthur Millers. But I hope that my students lived as intensely for a year or two as I did at Denver. Like Menand, I would not trade it for anything.

James Rosenberg
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

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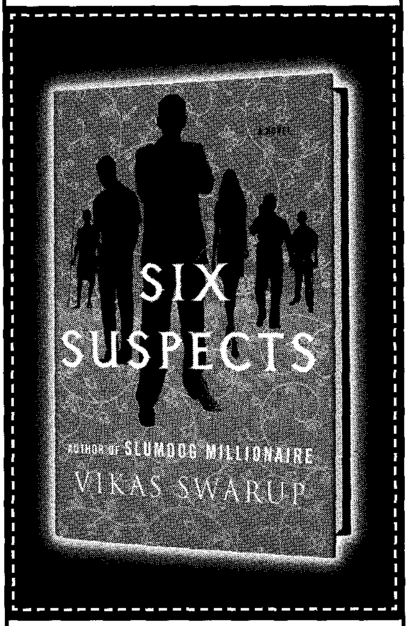
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

NEW FROM
THE AUTHOR OF
SLUMDOG
MILLIONAIRE



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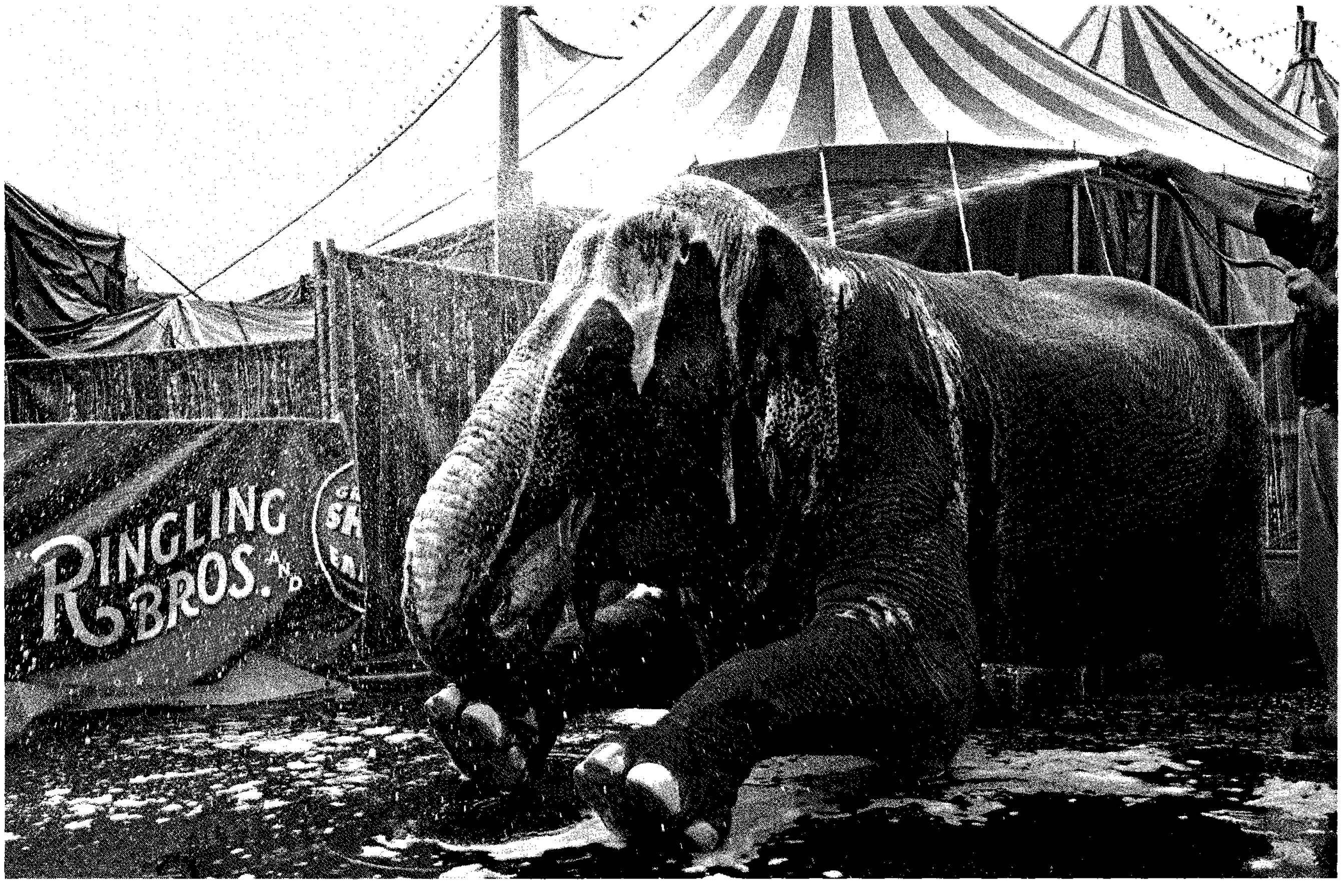

The Coney Island Boom a Ring circus. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
19	20	21	15	16	17	18

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
MASS EFFECT

The Williamstown Theatre Festival, in Massachusetts, premières a new play by Jonathan Marc Sherman, "Knickerbocker," on the Nikos Stage, with a cast that includes Peter Dinklage and Brooks Ashmanskas. On the Main Stage, Nate Corddry and Paul Sparks star in Sam Shepard's "True West." (See page 9.)

NIGHT LIFE
MAD FOR MADIBA

Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, Will.i.am, Aretha Franklin, Wyclef Jean, Queen Latifah, Dave Stewart, Angelique Kidjo, Baaba Maal, the Soweto Gospel Choir, Vusi Mahlasela, and many others celebrate Nelson Mandela's ninety-first birthday at Radio City Music Hall. (See page 10.)

ART
DOUBLE DUTCH

In the sixties and early seventies, Amsterdam was a capital of conceptual art. Foreigners (including Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner) flocked there to work, while Dutchmen like Bas Jan Ader and Jan Dibbets influenced artists both at home and abroad. "In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976," at MOMA, examines the era through some hundred and twenty works by ten European and American artists. (See page 11.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
AND THEY'RE OFF

Now that the denizens of Marlboro Music—including such stars as the pianist Mitsuko Uchida and the violinist Vera Beths—have been practicing for a while, they are ready to present a series of concerts, which begin this week in the southern Vermont town. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
WAVEFORMS

Because the screening room at the Museum of the Moving Image is closed for renovation, it's borrowing the one at the Museum of Arts and Design for a series of French New Wave classics. This week, a crucial precursor to the genre, Roger Vadim's ". . . And God Created Woman," with its revelation of Brigitte Bardot, is paired with the movie that launched it all, François Truffaut's "The 400 Blows." (See page 21.)

"LUSCIOUS, DISHY FUN."

– Owen Gleiberman, Entertainment Weekly

"REVEALS THE IMPENETRABLE MYSTIQUE OF ANNA WINTOUR."

– Kim Masters, The Sundance Channel

"JUICY... A GREAT ONE TO WATCH."

– Betsy Sharkey, Los Angeles Times

"COMPLETELY ADDICTIVE."

– Andrew O'Hehir, Salon.com

"REMARKABLE."

– Monita Rajpal, CNN

"IMMENSELY ENJOYABLE."

– Krista Smith, Vanity Fair

"FASHION-LOVING FILM BUFFS WILL RELISH 'THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE.' THE FILM CAPTURES THE UNIQUE PASSION AND DELICATE RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE EACH PAGE OF 'VOGUE' A REALITY."

– Meghan Cass, Women's Wear Daily

"FASCINATING."

– Owen Gleiberman, Entertainment Weekly

A FILM BY R.J. CUTLER

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[illegible] MOLLY THOMPSON ROBERT DeBITETTO ROBERT SHARENOW R.J. CUTLER
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IN THEATRES THIS FALL

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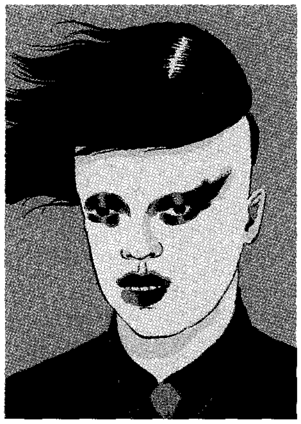
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DIVA DECONSTRUCTED

If there's such a thing as a post-structuralist, transgendering singer, it's M. Lamar. While songs are his métier, he's ultimately a performance artist who celebrates and parodies the very idea of the chanteuse: he deconstructs the persona of the diva even as he wraps himself in divalike hauteur. I first saw him last year, when the brilliant performer and downtown impresario Justin Bond curated a show that featured a number of up-and-coming luminaries. Lamar stood out, not least because of his bass-inflected falsetto, his strident, melodramatic piano playing, and what he celebrated in one song: a certain part of the female anatomy. Sporting a black weave and white boots, Lamar took himself as seriously during that performance as any myth in the making can and should. The twenty-nine-year-old artist has a show at the Chocolate Factory, July 16-18, called "The Black Death," a song cycle that, as he puts it, "traces landscapes of longing caused by extreme dehumanization." In other words, Lamar means to perform work about home, hearth, hope.

—Hilton Als



THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ART OF MEMORY
Company SoGoNo presents an experimental comedy by Lisa Ramirez, narrated by four librarians. Tanya Calamoneri directs. Previews begin July 16. Opens July 20. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

FEROCIOUS SPECTACULAR, EPISODE ONE: THE BLACK DEATH
The performer M. Lamar presents a new song cycle, as part of a series hosted by the Vintage DJ, at the Chocolate Factory. July 16-18. (5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 212-352-3101.)

DRACULA!
Moose Hall Theatre Company presents this drama, adapted from Bram Stoker's novel, as part of its annual Inwood Shakespeare Festival, alfresco and free of charge. Ted Minos directs. Opens July 15. (Inwood Hill Park Peninsula, enter at Indian Rd. and W. 218th St. 212-567-5255.)

FIGHT GIRL BATTLE WORLD
Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company presents Qui Nguyen's sci-fi action comedy, in which the last human female in existence hunts the galaxies for the last human male—before aliens destroy him. July 14-18. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

LIFE AND FATE
Maly Drama Theatre, from St. Petersburg, brings an adaptation of Vasily Grossman's novel, set in early-nineteen-forties Russia, about a Jewish woman and her physicist son in a ghetto in Ukraine. Lev Dodin adapted and directs, as part of the Lincoln Center Festival. In Russian with English supertitles. Opens July 21. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500.)

MOTHER
Buck Henry and Holland Taylor star in the première of Lisa Ebersole's drama, in which an eccentric family gathers for New Year's Eve at a resort in West Virginia. Opens July 15. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

PEASANT OPERA
Béla Pintér and Company (from Budapest) presents the U.S. première of a play by Pintér—with folk music composed by Benedek Darvas—about the comedic travails of two families, at the Lincoln Center Festival. In Hungarian with English supertitles. Opens July 21. (Clark Studio Theatre, W. 65th St. and Amsterdam Ave. 212-721-6500.)

SAMUEL FRENCH INC. OFF OFF BROADWAY SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL
The thirty-fourth annual festival of short works. July 14-19. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

VANITIES
Judith Ivey directs a musical based on the 1976 comedy by Jack Heifner, with music and lyrics by David Kirshenbaum, about three Texas cheerleaders who come of age during the dawn of women's lib. In previews. Opens July 16. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

WILDFLOWER
The second work of Second Stage's "Uptown Series" is a première by Lila Rose Kaplan, about a woman and her son who attempt to break out of their small-town life. Giovanna Sardelli directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

NOW PLAYING

ARCHBISHOP SUPREME TARTUFFE
Does any New York actor work as hard for his audiences as André De Shields? In the Classical Theatre of Harlem's modern spin on Molière, by Alfred Preisser and Randy Weiner, De Shields is the hedonistic mega-preacher Tartuffe—a smooth talker in red velour, with a penchant for Cadillacs and women. Tartuffe has his fingers in the wallet of the fat cat Orgon (Gerron Atkinson), whose family is determined to expose the evangelist as a swindler. The story, told with maximum song and skin, is a celebration of vice—and of De Shields's ability to electrify a stage. It's to his credit that the play, structured as an ironic revival meeting, has something of the vitality of the real thing. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

EAST TO EDINBURGH FESTIVAL
Shows heading to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe play here first. The lineup includes Desiree Burch's "52 Man Pickup" and "No Parole," by Carlo D'Amore, directed by Margarett Perry. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

LES ÉPHÉMÈRES
As part of the Lincoln Center Festival, Le Théâtre du Soleil performs a drama (created by the company) that explores the transience of human existence. Ariane Mnouchkine directs. In French with English supertitles. (Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-721-6500. Through July 19.)

THE EUROPEANS
A young European woman, Katrin (Aidan Sullivan), is raped and brutally tortured by a gang of Turkish soldiers during the siege of Vienna in 1683, and she wants revenge—not just on those who hurt her but on everyone. Meanwhile, Starhemberg (Robert Emmet Lunney), the Imperial General responsible for ending the horrific siege, wanders from woman to woman (including Katrin) in Vienna, trying to find some kind of human connection, to no avail. The war has wiped away morality, and God, as a faithless priest (Robert Zukerman) puts it, groans over his wayward creation. Apart from a wonderful, realized performance by Sullivan, as a woman rendered insane by pain, and a couple of gruesomely absurd and funny moments between the priest and his zealous lover, Susannah (Megan Byrne), Howard Barker's tragic comedy from 1993, directed by Richard Romagnoli, adds nothing original or thought-provoking to the antiwar canon. Though the players seem to be enjoying themselves, the play, at two and a half hours, is tedious. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL
SoHo Think Tank's annual procession of new works continues with Aztec Economy's "Lavaman," by Casey Wimpee. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

KALKWERK
Narodowy Stary Teatr, from Kraków, presents an adaptation of Thomas Bernhard's 1970 novel, about an obsessive scientist who holds his disabled wife captive. Krystian Lupa directs, at the Lincoln Center Festival. In Polish with English supertitles. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500. Through July 18.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The Drilling Company opens its sixteenth Shakespeare in the Parking Lot season with this romantic comedy, free of charge, on the Lower East Side. (Parking lot on the corner of Ludlow and Broome Sts. 212-877-0099.)

MIDTOWN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
This year's annual festival of new comedies, dramas, and musicals includes works such as "Whiskey, Beer, and Apple Pie," "The Sword Politik," "Pound: The Poet on Trial," "Love, Humiliation, and Karaoke," "Seal Songs," and "I Hate Love." (Various locations. 866-811-4111.)

SUMMER PLAY FESTIVAL
At the Public, the annual short-play festival includes works by Ken Urban, Zayd Dohrn, Rick Viede, and Nicki Bloom. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THÉRÈSE RAQUIN
PTP/NYC presents this adaptation of the Zola novel, by Neal Bell, directed by Jim Petosa, in repertory with "The Europeans." (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TIN PAN ALLEY RAG
Roundabout Theatre Company presents a new musical, written by Mark Saltzman, about a fictitious meeting between Irving Berlin and Scott Joplin, featuring the music of both. Stafford Arima directs. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

GRANT SHAFFER

UNDERGROUNDZERO FESTIVAL
At P.S. 122, the third annual festival of experimental theatre includes works by TerraNOVA Collective, Kyle Jarrow, and Blessed Unrest, among many others. (First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Aeschylus' "Oresteia" trilogy—"Agamemnon," "Choephori," and "The Eumenides"—translated by Ted Hughes and directed by Gregory Thompson, opens July 15. Also, the Spiegeltent returns to the Bard grounds, with appearances by Justin Bond, Cynthia Hopkins, Taylor Mac, the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, the Wau Wau Sisters, and the roller-skating comic Amy G. (Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BAY STREET THEATRE
David Esbjornson directs Moira Buffini's dinner-party satire "Dinner"; the cast includes Reed Birney, J. Smith Cameron, and Mercedes Ruehl. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
At the Unicorn, Ralph Petillo directs "Candide"; on the Main Stage, Eric Hill directs Paul D'Andrea and Jon Klein's "Einstein Project," a biographical look at the iconic physicist, through July 18. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the grounds of Boscobel, Terrence O'Brien directs Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," in repertory with "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Main Stage, Daniel Goldstein directs Sam Shepard's "True West," starring Nate Corddry and Paul Sparks, opening July 15. On the Nikos Stage, Nicholas Martin directs the première of Jonathan Marc Sherman's "Knickerbocker," with a cast that includes Brooks Ashmanskas, Peter Dinklage, and Reg Rogers, through July 19. For more information, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 19. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **KRAPP, 39:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MARY STUART:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT FALL:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **SWEET STORM:** Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 21: **Toots & The Maytals.** If Bob Marley and the Wailers were the heart of reggae, then Frederick (Toots) Hibbert and his Maytals must surely be its soul: it was the group's 1968 hit, "Do the Reggay," that gave ska, dub, rock steady, and every other substratum of Jamaican music one all-encompassing name. Bring your dancing shoes for "Funky Kingston" and "Pressure Drop," along with the Maytals' take on John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—July 15: **Wavves.** Nathan Williams, the face of these fuzz-pop upstarts, enjoyed (and endured) an upswing in attention and reputation over the last year. It hasn't been an easy ride—at a calamitous show in Barcelona, he had a meltdown that put a halt to their European summer tour. Also on the bill is Brooklyn's psych-folk harmonic outfit **Woods,** whose haunting and sweet music pops and crackles with the nostalgia of an old record.

BRUAR FALLS
245 Grand St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-529-6610)—This new venue, founded by the brothers Nick and Andy Bodor (the team behind Cake Shop), has instantly become a local go-to spot for a contemporary scene that refuses straightforward classification. The Bodors have an appreciation for pop music that's rooted in rabid record collecting, and they take a particularly broad approach to programming. On July 17, the bill is somewhat psychedelic, pairing the kaleidoscopic folk of Philadelphia's **Kurt Vile** with the minimalist, repetitious, and noisy musings of the Queens-based duo **Blues Control,** who will be celebrating the release of their newest record, "Local Flavor."

CAKE SHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—July 17: **Abe Vigoda.** Although they take their name from the elderly actor, who is best known for playing Tessio (in "The Godfather"), Fish (in "Barney Miller"), and dead (there are frequent false rumors of Vigoda's demise), this Los Angeles-based four-piece has always been lighthearted enough to make the moniker feel sardonic. But their recent EP, "Reviver," which consists of four originals and one Stevie Nicks cover, feels significantly more solemn than their previous efforts, with their trademark "tropical punk" sound employed for a darker purpose.

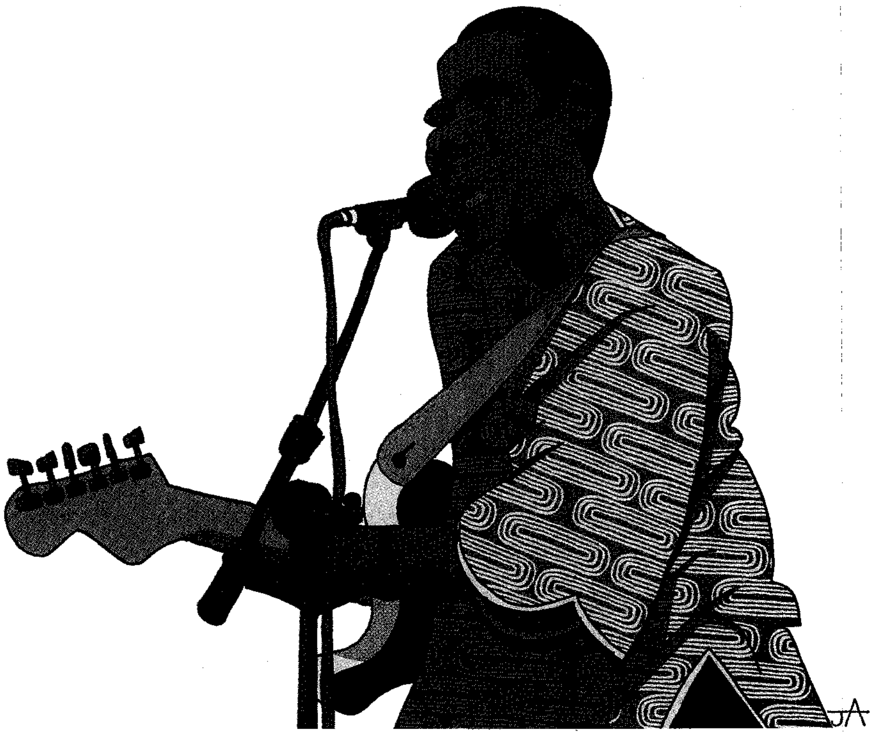
CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 16: The **Kronos Quartet** (see Classical). ♦ July 17: The soulful blues singer **Robert Cray.** With the **Sweet Divines.** ♦ July 18: A day-long African Festival, with **King Sunny Adé,** the **Mandingo Ambassadors, Abena Koomson, Sing Sing,** and **Yasser Darwish.**

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 18: The old-school rapper **Q-Tip** rolls uptown, with a few friends in tow, including **Chester French, Little Dragon,** and **Benji B.**

CITY WINERY
155 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—July 21: The cosmopolitan Portuguese vocalist **Lura** explores the music of Cape Verde, the land of her forebears.

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (877-598-8694)—July 17-18: **Eva Ayllón,** a superstar in her native Peru, sings Afro-Peruvian music with gleeful abandon.

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL
July 18: The Algerian musician **Idir** makes his U.S. début. With the Moroccan vocalist **Najat Aâtabou.** (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ The seventy-nine-year old singer, songwriter, composer, and arranger **Wardell Quezergue,** who was christened the "Creole Beethoven" by Allen Toussaint, has had a hand in the making of countless hits, including Robert Parker's "Barefootin'," the Dixie Cups' "Iko Iko," Earl King's "Trick Bag," Professor Longhair's "Big Chief," and Jean Knight's "Mr. Big Stuff." On July 19, **Mac Rebennack** (a.k.a. Dr. John), **Michael Hurtt, Jean Knight, Tammy Lynn, Zigaboo Modeliste, Dorothy Moore,** and others salute the New Orleans legend. He'll be onstage, too, leading his ten-piece Rhythm & Blues Orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall.) July 21: "Afro-Blues for the Twenty-first Century," a double bill with the duo of **Justin Adams** and **Juldeh Camara** and **Issa Bagayogo.** (Alice Tully Hall. For more information about all the events, visit www.lincolncenter.org.)



King Sunny Adé headlines the daylong African Festival at Celebrate Brooklyn!

JASHAR AWAN

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
July 15: A night of tango, with **Otros Aires.** July 16: Ponderosa Stomp presents a program of vintage R. & B., with **William Bell, Harvey Scales,** the **Bobettes,** and the **Bo-Keys.** July 17: Ponderosa Stomp returns with the finest rockabilly this side of the Rio Grande. The **Collins Kids, Carl Mann, Joe Clay,** and **Deke Dickerson and the Ecco-Fonics** are set to perform. July 18: The **New Swing Sextet** traffics in boogaloo. July 21: The singer **Catherine Russell,** backed by **Cat & the Hounds Swing Band.** (Lincoln Center. Through July 25. For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—July 18: **Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, Will.i.am, T-Pain, Gloria Gaynor, Aretha Franklin, Wyclef Jean, Queen Latifah, Dave Stewart, Josh Groban, Jesse McCartney, Angelique Kidjo, Baaba Maal, the Soweto Gospel Choir, Vusi Mahlasela,** and many other musicians celebrate Nelson Mandela's ninety-first birthday.

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 16: **Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra** is joined by the keyboardist **Bernie Worrell** and a number of vocalists, including **Sandra St. Victor** and **Shilpa Ray,** for a tribute to Sly and the Family Stone. (Castle Clinton.) July 17: The indie-rock institution **Superchunk** returns after an eight-year break. The Chapel Hill band remains as devoted as ever to its D.I.Y. convictions and to its earnest brand of rock. Their fellow indie stalwarts **Versus** accompany them. (South Street Seaport.) (For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—July 17: The **Mannequin Men,** a raucous garage band from Chicago that plays a juvenile blend of sweaty rock, wallows in the mythos of outlaw depravity. Equally renowned and reviled for being obnoxious, the Men have a new album, the GN'R-baiting "Lose Your Illusion, Too." With the equally engaging Puerto Rican ensemble **Davila 666.**

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—July 16-17: The **Dead Weather.** As if fronting the celebrated bands the White Stripes and the Raconteurs weren't enough, the enigmatic indie-rock renaissance man Jack White has returned with yet another band. The difference is that this time he plays the drums instead of the guitar. Filled out by Alison Mosshart, of the Kills, on vocals, Jack Lawrence, of the Raconteurs, on bass, and the guitarist Dean Fertita, on loan from the Queens of the Stone Age, the Dead Weather specialize in dark rock flecked with electronic effects and the occasional vocal contribution from White.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—July 17: **Abe Vigoda** (see Cake Shop) plays an early show before heading downtown. This performance is part of a series of concerts connected to the conceptual artist Dan Graham's current retrospective.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 15-18: With the **Cannonball Adderley Legacy** project, the drummer **Louis Hayes** salutes the fervent hard-bop sound of his former boss. **Julius Tolentino** holds down the essential alto-saxophone position.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 14-19: The brass man **Chuck Mangione.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 20: During this rare visit, the undeservedly overlooked West Coast saxophonist **Mel Martin** receives impeccable support from the pianist **Don Friedman.**

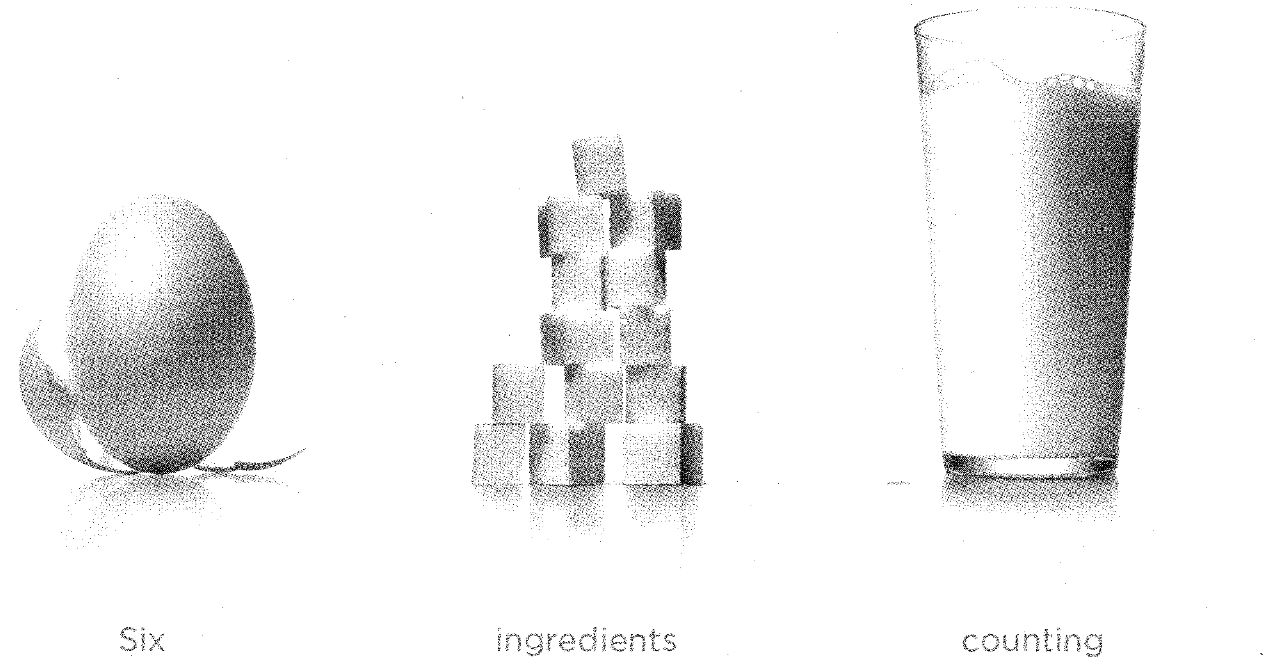
IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 16-19: **Corey Glover, Lew Soloff, Kenwood Dennard,** and others explore the music of Sting. A small portion of the proceeds from these shows benefits the Rain Forest Foundation, a charity established ten years ago by the pop star and his wife, Trudie Styler.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—July 14-15: Two restlessly inventive guitarists, **Charlie Hunter** and **Doug Wamble,** are joined by the drummer **Tony Mason.** A bassist won't be missed—Hunter's additional seventh string takes care of the bottom end. July 16-19: **Stefon Harris** and **Blackout.** Harris, the standout vibraphonist of his generation, uses this band to investigate the funk and hip-hop influences that he shies away from when appearing with more straitlaced jazz ensembles.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—July 15: With a justly acclaimed début album, "Infernal Machines," **Darcy James Argue's Secret Society** joins Maria Schneider's ensemble in the top rank of contemporary jazz big bands. Smart, melodious writing and the judicious use of big guitar textures make for an unexpected gem of a recording.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—July 18: The **Ralph Lalama** trio finds the seasoned and studied tenor saxophonist leading a pianoless threesome with the drummer **Clifford Barbaro** and the bassist **Pat O'Leary.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 14-19: The relentlessly eclectic pianist **Bill Carrothers** has been heard to fine effect with Dave Douglas and others as well as on his own absorb-



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ing albums, some of which call on his antiquarian musical interests. He's here with the bassist **Nic Thys** and the drummer **Dre Pallemaerts**, the same ensemble heard on the 2001 album "Swing Sing Songs."

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul."** Through Sept. 20. ♦ **"Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Michelangelo's First Painting."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"Pen and Parchment: Drawing in the Middle Ages."** Through Aug. 23. ♦ **"Napoleon III and Paris."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976."** Opens July 19. ♦ **"James Ensor."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Projects 90: Song Dong."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Looking at Music: Side 2."** Through Nov. 30. ♦ **"Aernout Mik."** Through July 27. ♦ **"Performance 4: Roman Ondák."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward."** Through Aug. 23. (Open Fridays, and Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturdays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Dan Graham: Beyond."** Through Oct. 11. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen: The Music Room."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Sadie Benning: Play Pause."** Through Sept. 20. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Yinka Shonibare MBE."** Through Sept. 20. ♦ **"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Kaleidoscope Quilts: The Art of Paula Nadelstern."** Through Sept. 13. ♦ **"The Treasure of Ulysses Davis."** Through Sept. 6. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

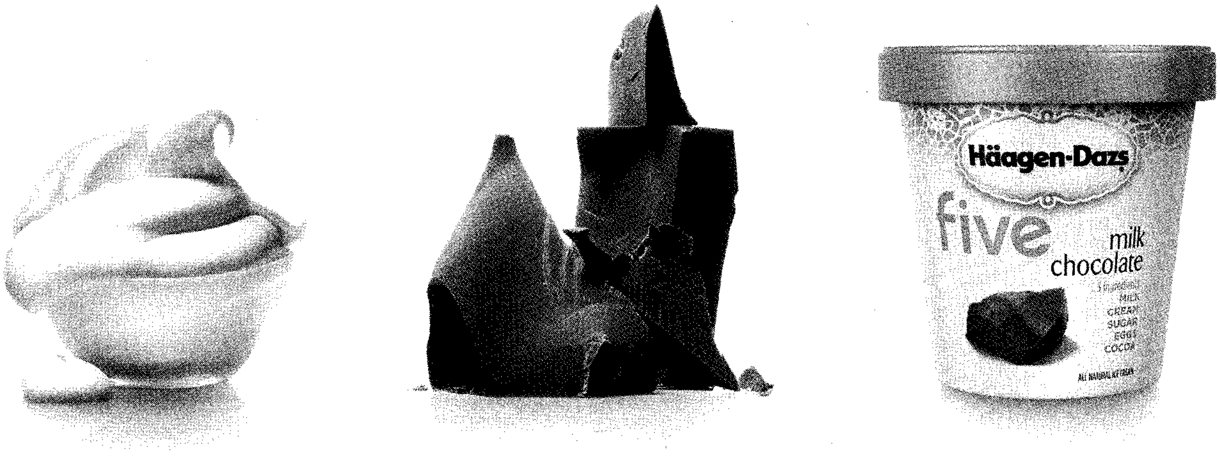
CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
556 W. 22nd St. (212-255-0719)—**"Iran Inside Out."** Through Sept. 5. (Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Design for a Living World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (212-217-5800)—**"Isabel Toledo: Fashion from the Inside Out."** Through Sept. 26. (Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Portraits, Pastels, Prints: Whistler in the Frick Collection."** Through Aug. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GREY ART GALLERY
100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—**"John Wood."** The earliest photographs in Wood's retrospective, "On the Edge of Clear Meaning" (which continues at I.C.P.), were made in the nineteen-sixties; the most recent are from the nineties. But they all share an experimental, mixed-media approach that recalls early Rauschenberg and looks more arty than avant-garde today. Yet the best of Wood's works are engaged and allusive, often involving collage, montage, text, drawing, painting, and the dissolution of figuration into layered, fragmented abstraction. Wood touches on issues (the environment, the war in Vietnam) but seems most radical when he's pushing photography beyond the old conventions, anticipating a breakdown of boundaries that is the new norm. Through July 18. (Open Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE WORLD'S A STAGE

The tensest and most charged of Shakespeare films, "Throne of Blood," is also the foggiest. For a while, at the start of this 1957 adaptation of "Macbeth," by Akira Kurosawa (which screens at Walter Reade on July 15 and July 19), you wonder whether, and how, the action will ever break free of the mist. The sense of release, once the film does snap awake, is unforgettable: riders racing through glades, heralds yelling news of desperate conflicts. None of the play's dialogue survives; or, rather, it is distilled into a stream of images both foul and fair. The divided warrior is Washizu (Toshiro Mifune), who is tempted to seek his destiny by a single, thread-spinning spectre (rather than by the usual trio of witches) and urged along by his formidable spouse (Isuzu Yamada), who is herself no more than a glimmering ghost as she emerges from the gloom with a drug to dope the guards. No stage production could match Kurosawa's Birnam Wood, and, in his final framing of the hero—a human hedgehog, stuck with arrows—he conjures a tragedy not laden with grandeur but pierced, like a dream, by the absurd.

—Anthony Lane

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Avedon Fashion 1944-2000."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"David Seidner: Paris Fashions, 1945."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"John Wood: Quiet Protest."** Through Sept. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. ♦ **"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Thursdays to Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Creating the Modern Stage: Designs for Theatre and Opera."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"Pages of Gold: Medieval Illuminations from the Morgan."** Sixty book leaves in the Morgan's collection, illuminated between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, feature scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Jesus appears as an infant (in a Spanish rendition of the "Virgin and Child Enthroned," made circa 1500), as a young man (in the Hungarian master's "Scenes from the Life of Christ," made circa 1325-35), and as a martyr (in a German leaf made circa 1500 by Springinklee the Elder, who portrayed the Crucifixion with grim naturalism). But the stars of the show are the Old Testament heroes like Samuel and David, in scenes from the Winchester Bible, an unfinished twelfth-century British masterpiece. The page for David, richly painted in blue, red, and gold, was the last leaf acquired by Pierpont Morgan before he died, in 1913. Through Sept. 13. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Dutch Seen: New York Rediscovered."** Through Sept. 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Reconfiguring the Body in American Art, 1820-2009."** Through Nov. 15. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Intersections Intersected: The Photography of David Goldblatt."** Opens July 15. ♦ **"Rigo 23: The Deeper They Bury Me, the Louder My Voice Becomes."** Opens July 15. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-784-7088)—**"Noguchi Reinstalled."** Through Oct. 24. (Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Kenneth Anger."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Lutz Bacher: My Secret Life."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

TIM HAWKINSON
Hawkinson has an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink approach to materials (he can whip up a creepy flying bat using nothing but plastic bread bags, plastic tabs, and twist ties), but he is fastidious when it comes to execution. In a sculpture titled "Sherpa," eight types of bird feathers have been impeccably arranged into a full-scale model of a Harley-Davidson. In "Bather," eggshells (glued into place with congealed egg) form the "Woman of Willendorf." Such jokes—creating a fertility symbol with eggs—can be tiresome, and nothing here rivals the reverberating impact of the gigantic "Überorgan," installed in the lobby of the former I.B.M. Building in 2005. Through July 24. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

PAUL HIMMEL
Himmel, a New York photographer with a long, vivid career, died in February, at age ninety-four, so the exhibition that he helped plan has become a memorial of sorts—inadequate to his legacy but heartfelt and welcome. The city, from Harlem to Coney Island, is the show's prime focus, with wonderfully atmospheric shots of Third Avenue under the shadow of the El, the Brooklyn Bridge, and Broadway, all from the nineteen-fifties. A few years earlier, he shot dense crowds surging through Grand Central, always locating the few still points in the agitated blur. Most of these images are here in unusually oversized prints, the better to stand up to a trio of even bigger abstracted nudes, as graphic as Rorschach blots on white paper. Through Aug. 28. (De Lellis, 1045 Madison Ave., at 80th St. 212-327-1482.)

MICHAEL SCOTT
The New York painter has had an omnivorous approach to abstraction—from his early experiments with neo-expressionism and targets to Op-art black-and-white stripes to the jewel-toned line paintings here. There are obvious affinities with Gene Davis (king of the colorful vertical stripe) but hard-edged precision is replaced by wavering evidence of the human touch. When the palette becomes too restricted (reined in to oranges and reds or pinks and greens) the effect can be overly stylized—more J. Crew than Ross Bleckner. But at their best, Scott's paintings have a visual hum that's irresistible. Through Aug. 21. (Gering + Lopez, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 646-336-7183.)

Short List

JAMES LEE BYARS: Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Sept. 4. **LARRY RIVERS:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through Sept. 12. **KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through Aug. 21. **"AS LONG AS IT LASTS":** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Aug. 28. **"BLUE":** Graham, 32 E. 67th St. 212-535-5767. Through Aug. 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MARK COHEN
Other photographers are known for their pictures of Los Angeles, Paris, or Tokyo. Cohen's beat is Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, his gritty, working-class home town, but he's not exactly recording its civic landmarks. His subjects are the people he encounters on the streets, often at such close range that the work would feel confrontational, even rude, if it weren't so good-natured and amused. Although these terrific color prints are a product of the all but obsolete dye-transfer process, there's nothing precious about them; Cohen's dirty realism—his keen eye for grime, bruises, and decay—rules. His appetite for grunge is voracious, and we end up sharing his hunger. Through Aug. 28. (Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006.)

Short List

GUYTON\WALKER: Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Aug. 7. **DOROTHY IANNONE:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Aug. 14. **BASIL WOLVERTON:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 14. **"THE FEMALE GAZE":** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Sept. 19. **"A SENSED PERTURBATION":** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through July 31. **"SLOUGH":** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through July 24. **"SUMMER PICTURES":** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Sept. 12. **"TWENTY YEARS":** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Aug. 8.

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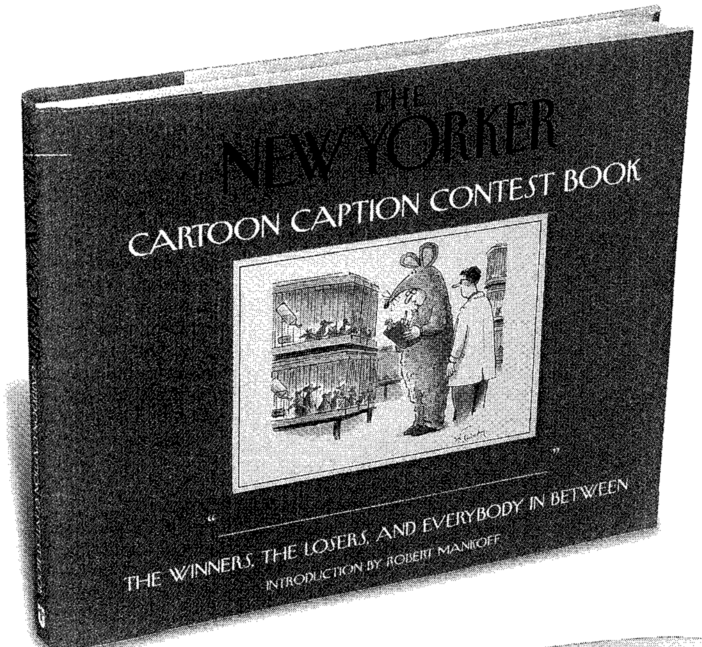
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INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT MANKOFF

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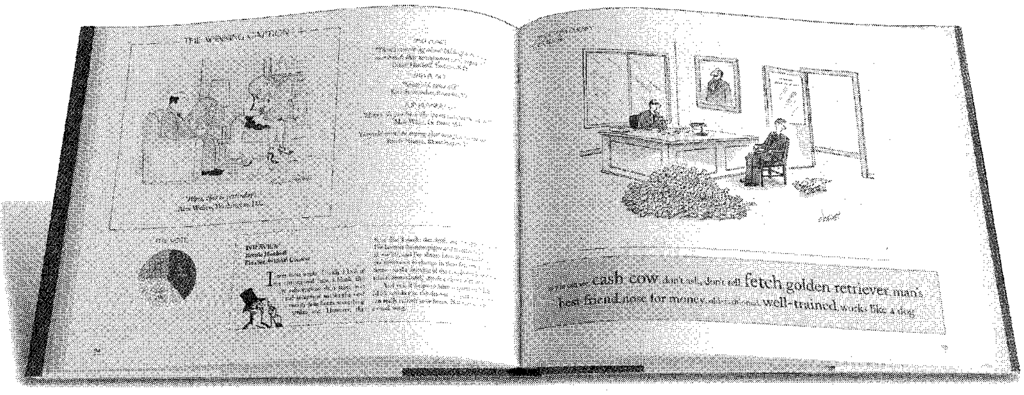

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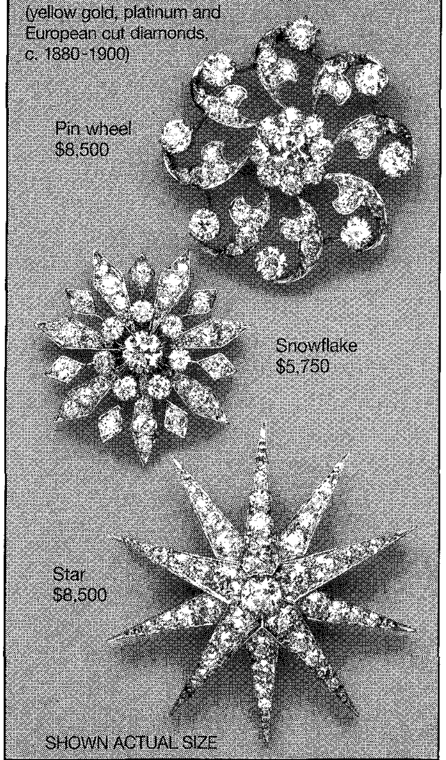

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GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"HELLUVA TOWN"
A number of the city's photography galleries have banded together to salute New York this summer, mining their inventories and mounting new work that touches on every facet of our town. Borden's lively mix is exemplary, and not just because it features photographs by Tina Barney, Lee Friedlander, and Martin Parr. Among the highlights: a classic Jan Groover triptych of downtown façades; Neil Winokur's high-impact still-lifes of a plastic traffic cone, an Empire State Building replica, and a takeout-coffee cup on brightly colored backdrops; and Ray Mortenson's masterly, meticulous study of a wall in an abandoned Bronx apartment, its crumbling plaster a pathetic echo of more magnificent ruins. Through July 31. (560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

Short List

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: APF Lab at SoHo Mews, 15 Wooster St. 212-966-0193. Through July 23. **THOMAS LAWSON:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through July 26. **ZIN TAYLOR:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through Aug. 2. **"THE ANKLE BONE IS HIGHER ON THE INSIDE":** Museum 52, 4 E. 2nd St. 347-789-7072. Through Aug. 7. **"BLACK ACID CO-OP":** Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Aug. 15. **"THE COLUMNS HELD US UP":** Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970. Through Aug. 1. **"THE LIVING AND THE DEAD":** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Aug. 7. **"LOVER":** On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012. Through July 26. **"NO BEES, NO BLUEBERRIES":** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through July 30.

DANCE

PILOBOLUS
The illusionist-acrobat-dancers of Pilobolus return to the Joyce for their annual season with three rotating programs. For the first set, Pilobolus co-founder Jonathan Wolken has produced "Redline," an exploration of the dramatic effects of physical combat; it will share the evening with the magical and shape-shifting "Darkness and Light," a collaboration with the puppeteer Basil Twist from last year. Program 2 is headlined by "Dog•id," a collaboration with Steven Banks (the head writer for "SpongeBob SquarePants"), and also features the eye-bending solo "Pseudopodia," one of their earliest pieces, from 1973. The company's association with the neo-surrealistic Israeli choreographers Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak, which began in 2007 with "Rushes" (which is on Program 1), continues with "2b," set to everything from Bach to Hawaiian pop. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 13-15 and July 20-21 at 7:30, July 16-17 at 8, and July 18 at 2 and 8. Through Aug. 8.)

EMANUEL GAT DANCE
The Israeli choreographer's new "Silent Ballet," presented at the Lincoln Center Festival, proceeds, as the title indicates, without accompaniment. The stage is also bare, and across it the ensemble clumps and disperses in shifting groups and pairings, sometimes freezing in tense tableaux, sometimes playing a sombre game of tag. Gat's "Winter Variations" returns to the duet territory of his best work, "Winter Voyage," setting two large men in uneasy relation to each other and to music by Richard Strauss and the Beatles. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. July 14 and July 16-17 at 8.)

"UNTITLED CORNER"
As part of L.M.C.C.'s "Sitelines," the choreographer-dancers Jonah Bokaer and Judith Sanchez Ruiz perform a coldly intimate duet in a corner built into Chase Manhattan Plaza by the visual artist Daniel Arsham. (1 Chase Manhattan Plaza, at Nassau St. 212-219-9401. July 15 at 7 and July 17 at 12:30.)

SUMMERDANZ
The seasonal dance series finishes up with two companies of full-bodied physicality. CorbinDances, led by the former Paul Taylor star Patrick Corbin, offers a première by the William Forsythe acolyte Jodie Gates, two lovely and musical pieces by Corbin, and a comic setting of Russian folk songs by Nelly van Bommel. Colleen Thomas presents three dances, two of them new, made in collaboration with the cellist-composer Chris Lancaster, who performs live and engages Thomas in a duet. The dances, which have trailing long titles with parentheses, swerve into singing and other unexpected modes to express various kinds of fantasy. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Corbin: July 15-16 at 7:30; Thomas: July 17-18 at 7:30.)

LYDIA JOHNSON DANCE
A creator of modest, handsome, ballet-based dances, Johnson offers a slow-build première set to music by Henryk Górecki. For "In Conversation (. . . Like Breathing . . . Like Flying)," the score is by Philip Glass, whose sense of lucid form Johnson shares. "Dream Sequence" is more playful, a period piece with a Twyla Tharp battle-of-the-sexes feel that floats on the crooning and inebriated swing of Dean Martin. (Ailey Citigroup, 405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. July 16-18 at 8.)

DANDELION DANCETHEATER / "MUTT"
The San Francisco-based experimental dance-theatre group presents an evening-length work about a girl born to a Japanese-American woman and a white prison guard at an internment camp in Texas during the Second World War. With its cast of sundry odd characters, spoken parts, and eclectic music, it's a bit like a quirky play, with dialogue replaced by plainly danced ensembles and solos meant to evoke the characters' mental states. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. July 16-18 at 8 and July 19 at 3.)

NICHOLAS LEICHTER DANCE
As part of L.M.C.C.'s free performance series "Sitelines," Leichter and Monstah Black beam down from the mothership for "A Space Funk Invasion" of South Street Seaport. While channelling the tradition of Parliament Funkadelic and pimps from outer space, the two experts in funk styles also throw in some pirate themes, à la Adam and the Ants, in honor of the site and in reference to current events. (Fulton and Front Sts. 212-219-9401. July 20-21 at 6. Through July 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
Ordinary people of various ages, wearing ordinary clothes, do ordinary things: walk, move their arms, speak, shake their hands, maybe do a turn or two. The Grenoble-based French ensemble Groupe Emile Dubois (at the Ted Shawn July 15-19) performs Jean-Claude Gallotta's "Des Gens Qui Dansent" ("Some People Dancing"), a kind of celebration of the everyday. ♦ At the Doris Duke July 15-19, David Roussève/REALITY attempts to evoke the bittersweet emotion encapsulated in the Portuguese word "Saudade." The music is fado, but the stories that Roussève tells, inhabiting various characters as he makes a slow diagonal across the stage, are African-American and Southern. Around him, a multicultural cast applies their own traditions—bharata natyam, Indonesian—to the subject and score, juxtaposing agonized frenzy with adagio longing in a not very subtle representation of resilience through dance. (Ted Shawn, Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Through Aug. 30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA
The economy is sour, but somehow the conductor Vincent La Selva soldiers on with his hardy little company. His free, fully staged production of "Il Trovatore" comes to Central Park's scruffy but dignified Naumburg Bandshell—which, like La Selva,

survives against daunting odds. Expect broad acting and summer-stock-type costumes, but ardent singing in authentically Verdian style. (Mid-Park, south of 72nd St. July 15 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "CONCERTS IN THE PARKS"
Unlike Lorin Maazel, Alan Gilbert plans to be a very New York-centric music director of his new orchestra: as a case in point, he leads all the concerts in the Phil's annual free summer series. The next is a repeat of the opening Central Park program, with Gilbert conducting Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A Major at Prospect Park, in Brooklyn. (July 15 at 8.) ♦ Gilbert and his musicians move to Van Cortlandt Park, in the Bronx, to offer the "Jupiter" Symphony and Mahler's Symphony No. 1 in D Major. (July 16 at 8.) ♦ The orchestra, with the baritone Nathan Gunn as its guest, returns to Central Park's Great Lawn to perform the Mahler symphony, as well as music for voice and orchestra by Mozart and Copland ("Old American Songs," Set Two). (July 17 at 8.) (Fireworks follow each concert. For more information, and for details regarding the orchestra's indoor concerts in Queens and Staten Island, see www.nyphil.org/summer.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 17 at 8: String quartets often appear at the barge, but the next ensemble—the daring FLUX Quartet—will provide listeners with an alternate view of the medium, performing works by such innovators as David Lang ("Wed"), Ivan Naranjo, Alvin Lucier, and Giacinto Scelsi (the Quartet No. 2, which requires copper mutes invented by the composer). ♦ July 18 at 8 and July 19 at 3: The classical repertory surges back in the form of piano trios by Brahms (No. 1 in B Major) and Dvořák (No. 4, the "Dumky"), performed by the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Edward Arron, and the pianist Jeewon Park. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!: KRONOS QUARTET
If there's any classical group that could slip naturally into this annual series' lineup of popular and world music, it's the Kronos, which will offer music from its new Middle Eastern album, "Floodplain," as well works by Missy Mazzoli ("Harp and Altar"), Michael Gordon, and Bryce Dessner. The Luminescent Orchestrii opens for them. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. No tickets required. July 16 at 7:30.)

SUMMERGARDEN
Concerts of new music and jazz have been a longstanding tradition at the Museum of Modern Art's Sculpture Garden. This week's concert features members of the New Juilliard Ensemble, who will offer the New York premières of string quartets by such noted composers as Jörg Widmann, David Flynn, and Daniel Bernard Roumain (the String Quartet No. 1, "X"), as well as the world première of a work by the distinguished Polish modernist Boguslaw Schaeffer. (11 W. 53rd St. July 19 at 8. No tickets required; seats are first come, first served.)

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD INSTITUTE & FESTIVAL
Jerome Rose's annual series at Mannes College brings concerts, lectures, and master classes, all centered on the art of the piano. Rose, a fine pianist in the bravura tradition, opens the event with a solo recital featuring Beethoven's Sonata in E-Flat Major, Op. 31, No. 3, as well as three works by Liszt (including "Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude"). (Mannes Concert Hall, 150 W. 85th St. July 19 at 8:30. 212-580-0210, ext. 4858. For full schedule, see www.ikif.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

CARAMOOR
July 16 at 7:30: Hispanic music of all sorts will be heard at the elegant Westchester festival this summer. From the classical side comes a recital by the noted Cuban pianist Jorge Luis Prats, who will perform works by Villa-Lobos, Lecuona, and Granados (from "Goyescas"), among others. ♦ July 17 at 8: Early music will be heard at the intimate Spanish Courtyard, courtesy of the Aulos Ensemble (with the soprano Dominique Labelle), performing a program entitled "Handel's Aviary." ♦ July 18 at 8: Opera at Caramoor is in the hands of the bel-canto specialist Will Crutchfield, who leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's and an impressive cast (featuring such singers as Lawrence Brownlee, Georgia Jarman, and Marco Nisticò) in Donizetti's **"L'Elisir d'Amore."** (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. For full schedule, see www.caramoor.org.)

TANGLEWOOD
The supreme music festival of the summer hits its stride. July 15 at 8: In a special program with Jordi Savall's invaluable early-music group Les Concert des Nations, the actor F. Murray Abraham takes the lead in "Stage Music in the Plays of William Shakespeare," a concert offering melodies and dances by the likes of Locke and Purcell ("The Fairy Queen"). ♦ July 17 at 8:30: Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, an almost painfully exquisite balance of light and dark, precedes Mahler's overpowering Symphony No. 6 in a concert by James Levine and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (with the pianist Leon Fleisher). ♦ July 19 at 2:30: Levine and the B.S.O. return for an all-Mozart program (the final Symphonies, Nos. 39-41). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. For full schedule, see www.tanglewood.org.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The weekend at the Yale School of Music's summer outpost begins with an inviting evening of Mozart, Ravel (the "Chansons Madécasses"), Beethoven, and Virgil Thomson, performed by such musicians as the Keller Quartet, the soprano Janna Baty, the clarinettist Richard Stoltzman, and the pianist André-Michel Schub. (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. July 17 at 8. For full schedule, see www.norfolkmusic.org.)

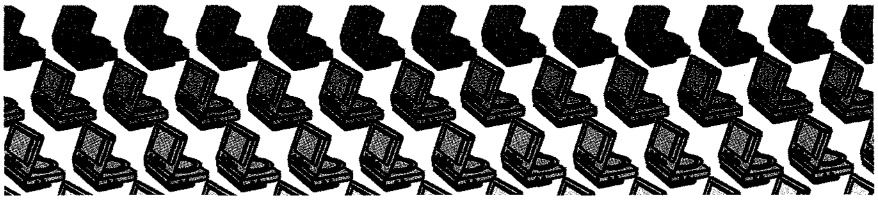
MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE HAMPTONS
In the second of two concerts offered by the Amernet String Quartet, the impassioned ensemble joins the clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein (the recent winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant) in music by Turina, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky. (Wölffer Estate Vineyards, Sagaponack, N.Y. July 17 at 8. For full schedule and ticket information, see www.musicfestivalofthehamptons.com.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Given the paltry state of summer opera in Gotham this summer, a trip up to Cooperstown is more appropriate than ever. July 18 at 8 and July 20 at 2: A production of **"La Traviata,"** by the redoubtable Jonathan Miller, inaugurates the season, with Mary Dunleavy, Ryan MacPherson, and Malcolm MacKenzie in the leading roles; Mikhail Agrest conducts. ♦ July 19 at 2: Rossini's delightful **"La Cenerentola"** is offered in a "naturalistic" production by Kevin Newbury, with Julie Boulianne, John Tessier, Eduardo Chama, and Keith Phares heading the cast; Joseph Colaneri. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MARLBORO MUSIC
The iconic summer chamber-music festival, headed by the pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Richard Goode, begins another season devoted to the (mostly German) classics; concert programs are announced a week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 18 at 8:30 and July 19 at 2:30.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The Cassatt String Quartet (with the cellist Marc Johnson) comes to the festival's whitewashed, air-conditioned shoebox hall to perform works by Dvořák and Schubert (the Quintet in C Major). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. July 19 at 3.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
One of several threads running through this year's series is a concentration on the solo string music of J. S. Bach. Tim Fain, an acclaimed young American violinist, has the stage to himself for the Sonata No. 3 and the Partita No. 2 (with the Chaconne); Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin completes the program. (Woodstock, N.Y. www.maverickconcerts.org. July 19 at 4.)



STEVE POWERS

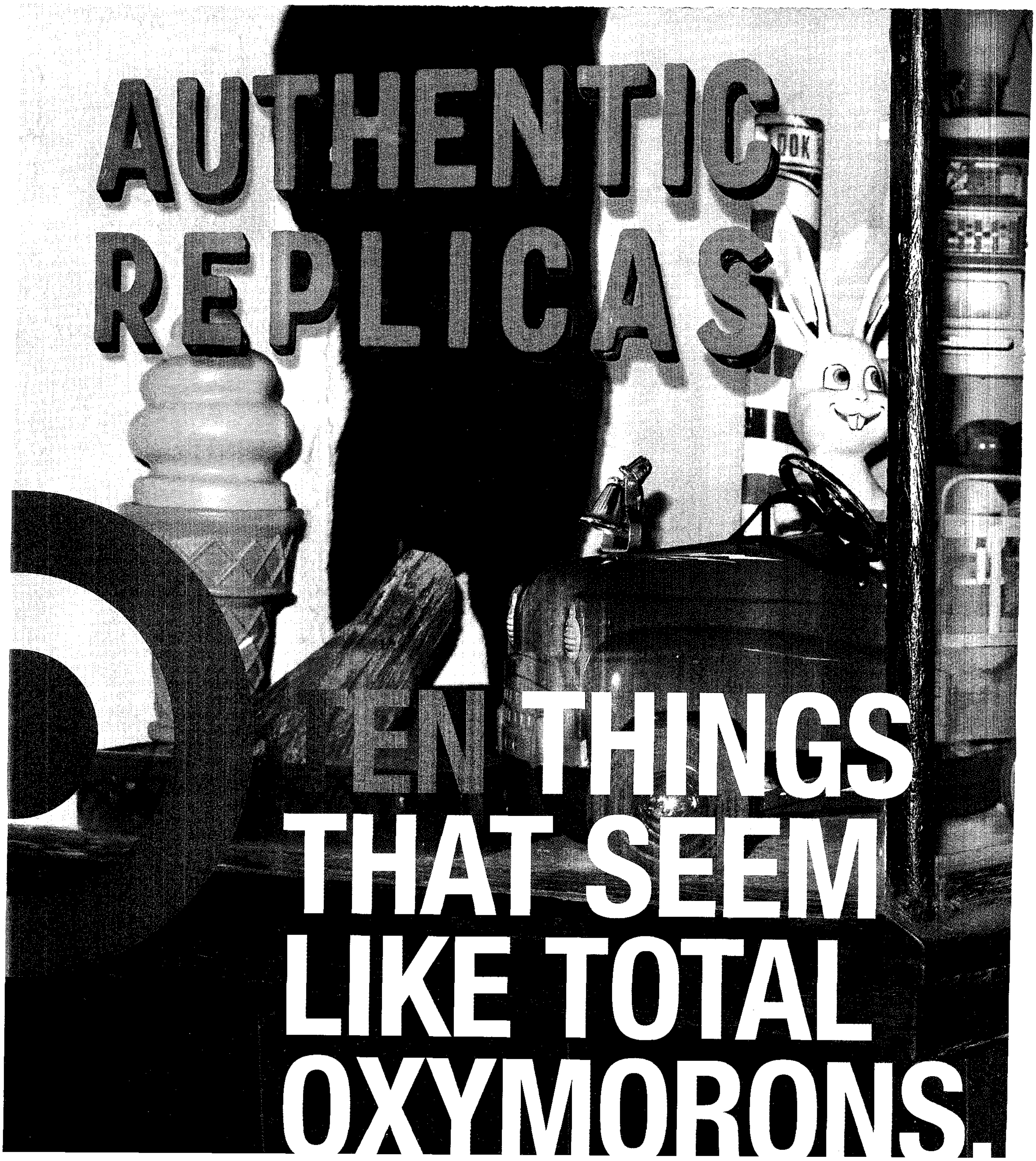
DVD NOTES
BURN BEFORE VIEWING

Lovers of classic Hollywood movies dismayed by the slow pace at which studios' back catalogues are released to DVD may be heartened by Warner Archive, which offers, at WarnerArchive.com, a long and growing list of films from Warner Bros., M-G-M, and RKO available as disks burned on demand and also as digital downloads. The repertoire notably features many distinctive melodramas from the nineteen-forties and fifties.

The genre suggests music, and music is integral to "The Man I Love" (1946), a jazz-centered film noir that was Martin Scorsese's inspiration for "New York, New York." With the opening number—a jam session in a Fifty-second Street night spot—the director, Raoul Walsh, conjures a thick mood of creative melancholy and cuts it with bracingly acerbic street smarts. Ida Lupino stars as Petey Brown, a respected but scuffling Manhattan torch singer who heads home to her orphaned siblings in a California town and gets entangled with two men: Nicky Toresca (Robert Alda), who runs the club where she gets a singing gig, and San Thomas (Bruce Bennett), a New York jazz legend who has given up music. Bennett's portrayal of a haunted genius is one of the most troubling in all cinema: his gaunt features, dark gaze, and distracted air suggest a hermetic world of tormented inspiration rarely seen in movies. But his madness was matched by that of the times—the end of the Second World War—which Walsh suggests through a backdrop of soldiers in uniform and dramatizes through a subplot about a veteran in a mental institution.

Nicholas Ray's "Party Girl," from 1958, takes a retrospective look at gangland Chicago in the early thirties, but his psychological approach to the violence is altogether modern. It, too, starts with a musical scene, featuring Cyd Charisse, in the title role, as a hard-nosed night-club danseuse who quickly pairs off with a darkly handsome, suavely understated Mob lawyer (Robert Taylor) and tries to pry him away from the underworld. Ray's direction, with its garish, searing streaks of color (red has rarely slashed the screen so violently), sharp diagonals, and quickly jerking wide-screen views, reflects its characters' raging energies and inner conflicts. A spectacular flameout of a dénouement reveals the self-destructive folly of unchecked ambition. Yet Ray lavishes as much passion on the elaborate backstory and on a strange medical subplot, suggesting that the evil doings on which the plot runs are, essentially, not failings but maladies awaiting treatment of their underlying causes.

—Richard Brody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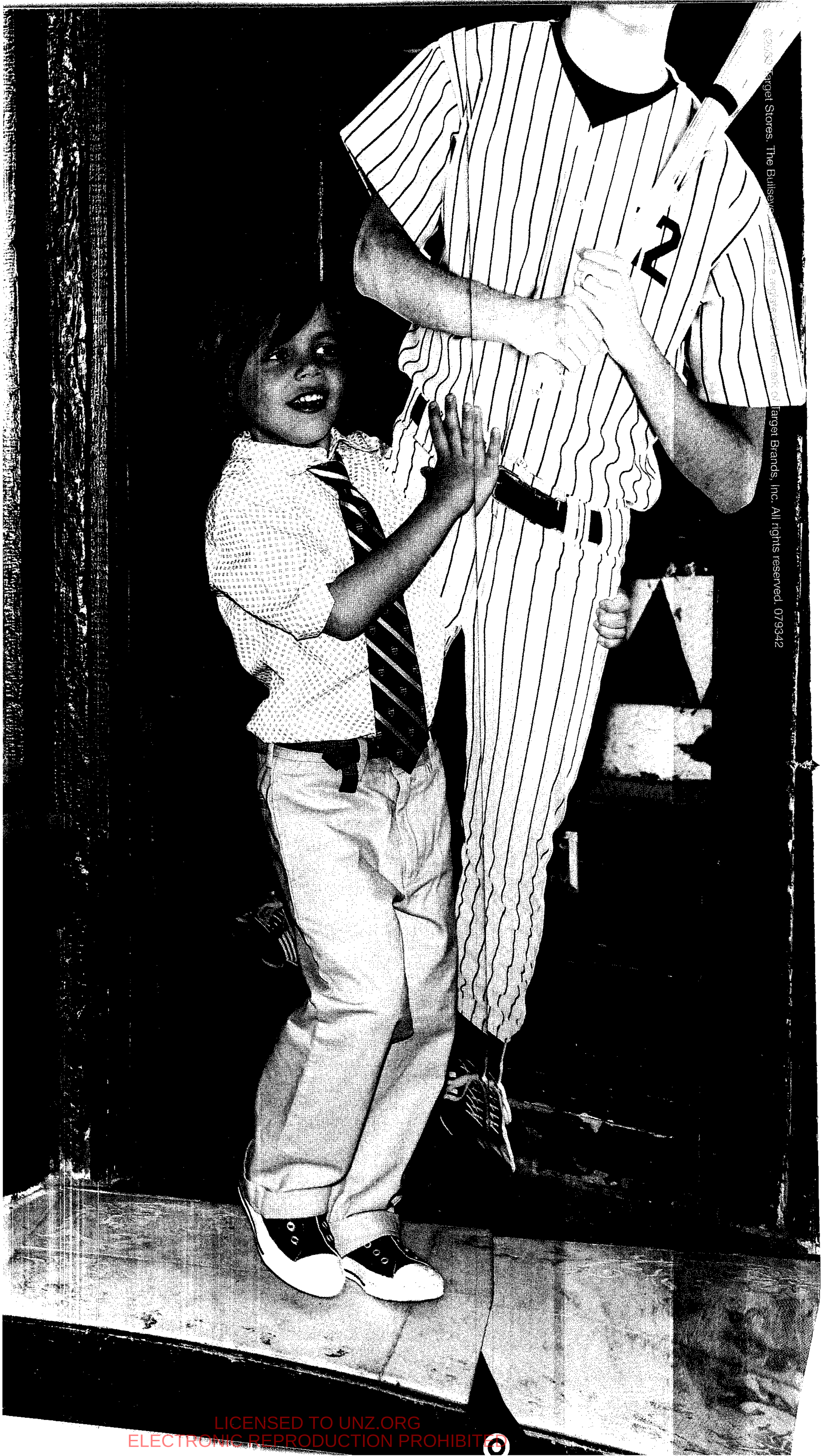

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MOVIES OPENING

DEATH IN LOVE
In this drama, directed by Boaz Yakin, two brothers (Josh Lucas and Adam Brody) face the repercussions of the affair that their mother had with a Nazi doctor when she was a concentration-camp inmate. Opening July 17. (Quad Cinema.)

DIED YOUNG, STAYED PRETTY
A documentary, directed by Eileen Yaghoobian, about the indie-rock-poster subculture. Opening July 17. (IFC Center.)

(500) DAYS OF SUMMER
A romantic comedy, directed by Marc Webb, starring Zooey Deschanel as a woman who doesn't believe in love and Joseph Gordon-Levitt as the man she falls in love with. Opening July 17. (In wide release.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE
The latest installment in the young-adult series, directed by David Yates and starring Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Helena Bonham Carter, and Jim Broadbent. Opening July 15. (In wide release.)

HOMECOMING
Morgan J. Freeman directed this drama, about a small-town girl who plots to murder her ex-boyfriend's college girlfriend. Starring Mischa Barton, Matt Long, Jessica Stroup, and Michael Lande. Opening July 17. (Village East Cinemas.)

OFF JACKSON AVENUE
John-Luke Montias directed this story of intersecting criminal activity in Queens, including sex slavery, car theft, and murder. Opening July 17. (Quad Cinema.)

SOMERS TOWN
Two boys living in a poor London neighborhood become unlikely friends. Directed by Shane Meadows; starring Thomas Turgoose and Piotr Jagiello. Opening July 15. (Film Forum.)

A WOMAN IN BERLIN
In this drama, directed by Max Färberböck, set in Berlin toward the end of the Second World War, a woman tries to survive the Soviet occupation. Starring Nina Hoss. Opening July 17. (Angelika Film Center.)

NOW PLAYING

AWAY WE GO
Sam Mendes, working with a script by the husband-and-wife novelists Dave Eggers and Vendela Vida, has created a movie very different in tone from "American Beauty," "Road to Perdition," and "Revolutionary Road," all of which tended to imprison their American characters in restrictive visual schemes. This movie is free and easy, almost ruminative in tone, like something from the early seventies. An unmarried couple in their thirties, Burt (John Krasinski) and Verona (Maya Rudolph), who is pregnant, struggle to figure out who they are and what they want. They travel around the country in an old Volvo, visiting friends and relatives. The vignettes are both funny and touching. With Allison Janney as an alcoholic who screams at her kids and Maggie Gyllenhaal as a pushy New Age mother whose virtue saps everyone's strength.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 6/8 & 15/09.) (In wide release.)

THE BEACHES OF AGNÈS
Starting alone on a beach, admitting the theatrical aspect of her self-presentation, the eighty-year-old director Agnès Varda sets up the serious play and heartfelt whimsy of this filmed autobiography. When, moments later, her crew strews the beach, under her exacting direction, with rickety arrays of antique mirrors, she establishes her retrospective gaze as a truth inseparable from the fictions of her imagination. Though she fulfills the rules of the genre, with a more or less chronological guided tour through the sites (in France and elsewhere) and the sights (her movies, photographs, and art projects) of her life, her main order of business is love. Her clever, freely associative set pieces spark encounters with family and long-unseen friends and guide her spoken reminiscences. The emotional core of the film is Varda's life with her late husband, the director Jacques Demy (who died in 1990), who, even now, continues to inspire her. Uninhibited about sex, generous in her affections, worldly-wise, blending solemn recollections with self-deprecating antics, Varda, seemingly freed from fear and shame by age and honors, goes far beyond a tale of life lived in art and makes a work of art in its own right, one of her best—a poignant, rapturously emotional tribute to life itself. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

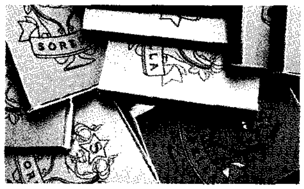
BRÜNO
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

CHÉRI
The enormous broad-brimmed hats and layered silk dresses; the double-lace curtains, velvet coverings, and ubiquitous flowers—all the externals in Stephen Frears's modestly budgeted adaptation of Colette's great novella "Chéri" feel right. The entire movie, even when it's set indoors, seems to be taking place in a bower, but a bower lit as a bedroom is lit when the evening is moving toward its passionate conclusion. Yet the picture doesn't quite come to life. Michelle Pfeiffer is an utterly beautiful woman and a good actress, but Colette is very clear about her courtesan heroine, Léa, as a physical type: at the age of forty-nine, she's plush and rounded, with magnificent shoulders. Pfeiffer, by contrast, is elegant and very slender—a twenty-first-century, much exercised body lying in a Belle Époque bed. As for the pale and handsome Rupert Friend, he has, as Chéri, the sulky self-absorption that Colette described and that Léa loves (she wants a beautiful boy, not a grown man), but the thin-lipped Friend is so cranky and silly that he's actually somewhat dislikable. Colette's tender irony is that these two rather useless people fall seriously in love, but the casting prevents us from feeling the bittersweet emotions that she evoked. With Kathy Bates as Léa's raucous and envious courtesan friend.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

FOOD, INC.
Robert Kenner's documentary is an angry blast of disgust aimed at the American food industry. It seems that the use of (heavily subsidized) corn as a cheap universal feed for chickens, for cows, and even for fish, not to mention the corn products that seep into candy, soft drinks, cheese, and almost everything else, has made that particular package of starch nearly inescapable. Kenner has many outrageous things to tell us about industrial food, but the picture is perhaps most upsetting when we get a glimpse (largely from footage shot surreptitiously by workers) of the way animals are now raised. Chickens, for instance, never see daylight, but are mostly kept in long, dark, stifling sheds where they stand in their own waste, fatted with corn until they are slaughtered, in a mere forty-nine days. Cows are also jammed together in enormous pens, many of them sick from feed that violates a digestive system built for grass. Eric Schlosser, the author of "Fast Food Nation" (2001), and Michael Pollan, who wrote "The Omnivore's Dilemma" (2006), lay out the case with devastating authority, and, after watching a number of farmers and rebels who fight the system, one comes out of the movie in a state of admiration and rage.—D.D. (6/29/09) (In limited release.)

THE HANGOVER
Three friends (Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, and Zach Galifianakis) have to reconstruct, after an alcohol-induced group memory loss, a wild bachelor party where they lost the groom (Justin Bartha). After waking up in a trashed Las Vegas hotel suite, the three lead characters come across a host of madcap surprises on their way to solving the mystery, and their director (Todd Phillips) has a natural, unfussy style that allows the actors plenty of room to

TABLES FOR TWO
SORELLA


JESSIE WENDER

95 Allen St. (212-274-9595)—On an unlovely stretch of Allen Street, in the Lower East Side, the chef Emma Hearst has opened an uncommonly lovely new restaurant. Hearst and her best friend (and general manager), Sarah Krathen, conceived of Sorella, Italian for "sister," during a journey through Piedmont, Italy's legendary northern wine region. In homage to these geographic origins, Krathen has curated a hundred-and-fifty-bottle list biased toward Piedmontese varietals. (There's also fantastic Gabry sparkling rosé, from the nearby Treviso province.) Befitting the venue's wine-soaked sensibility (one wall was literally painted with it), and the youth of the proprietors (both women are under twenty-five), the service is relaxed. Sometimes too relaxed: a slouching, mumbling bartender undermines the ambience of his domain. You're better off in the dining room, where a friendly hostess doesn't flinch at seating an incomplete party. Hydrangeas, herbs, and citrus flourish under a solarium roof. There is an aura of healthfulness, as at a California spa.

This illusion is broken with the first crunch of gratis *grissini*—the salty, twiglike bread sticks, served in a paper cone, are as abundant as they are addictive. Crispy fried Brussels sprouts, tossed with bits of bacon and apple, are equally habit-forming. To start the meal, diners are encouraged to select a variety of shareable *qualcosinas* ("little somethings"), any one of which might give your cardiologist a heart attack based on description alone. Hearst employs bacon liberally, as though it were merely a seasoning. In addition to the Brussels sprouts, it comes on quail, with sweetbreads, and, sugar-cured, sprinkled over fluffy French toast. Bacon also stars in the *pâté de fegato*, which has quickly become Hearst's signature dish: a spongy square of duck-fat bread, topped with chicken-liver mousse, topped with bacon, topped with a fried egg. Sweet and musky and extraordinarily decadent, it's like something Willy Wonka might have dreamt up if he'd dabbled in small plates. A bite or two is plenty—there's still an entrée to contend with. On a recent evening, the main courses comprised halibut with puréed potatoes (rich), a schnitzel-fried pork chop (richer), and goat-cheese risotto (richest). Well-prepared though they were, it was hard to muster much enthusiasm after the preceding symphony of triglycerides. Fresh vegetables would have offered a welcome contrast, but even the escarole salad was dressed in brown butter. Skip dessert—you won't want it—and finish with a homemade basil soda instead. For a moment, the tingly herbal elixir might convince you that you're just relaxing between beach yoga and a hot mud soak. (Closed July 12-28; otherwise open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Small plates $8-$16; prix fixe $26-$34.)

—Lila Byock

riff energetically through their parts (Cooper is especially good). The movie's episodic nature is not perfect (there's a fey Asian gambler who's the brunt of cheap gags), but what makes this bromance work is the performers' contagious camaraderie. With a sunny Heather Graham sweetening the mix.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

HUMPDAY

Given that Lynn Shelton's new film hails from the stable known as mumblecore, it's pretty loud, full of whinnying debate and gleeful shouts. A young husband and wife, Ben (Mark Duplass) and Anna (Alycia Delmore), are thrown by the arrival of Andrew (Joshua Leonard), a bearded Boudu who used to be Ben's close friend in college, and who brings with him a gust of the bohemian excess that the married couple like to think (or maybe fear) that they have left behind. During a boozy, pansexual evening at another house, Ben and Andrew conceive a crazy plan: they will contribute to a porno festival by having sex on camera—not just two straight guys but best buddies. Once sobered up, neither wants to back down from the encounter; they are determined to butch it out, and even Anna, though aghast, gives them the go-ahead. There is a trick here, which Shelton very nearly pulls off: so artless is her approach, with its ambling conversation and hovering, on-the-spot camerawork, and so generous are her actors (Delmore being the standout) that we wind up half-believing what is, by any standard, a ridiculous conceit. As a result, the film is at its best and most convincing as the heroes lose their nerve; bolder viewers will be disappointed, but when did you last see a comedy that built so inexorably toward an anticlimax? With Shelton herself, tellingly cast as the friend who will try anything.—*Anthony Lane* (In limited release.)

THE HURT LOCKER

Over and over, Staff Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner) walks to a bomb site in a heavy protective suit and tries to figure out how to pull apart the clumsily tangled wires and flimsy triggering devices of an I.E.D. (improvised explosive device). The two other members of James's team, the frightened young Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) and the wary, experienced Sanborn (Anthony Mackie), jerk their guns this way and that, covering him and screaming at anyone who moves. Kathryn Bigelow's movie is set in Baghdad in 2004, and it brings us, from its particular angle, closer to the dangers of the war than any other movie about this conflict. Bigelow keeps the space tight and coherent: no matter how many times she cuts away, you know exactly where James is in relation to the bomb—whether he's in the kill zone or far enough away to be safe (you can't break up the integrity of space when space is the subject of your movie). The movie is almost unbearably tense—it's a considerable achievement. With Guy Pearce and Ralph Fiennes in small roles. Written by Mark Boal.—*D.D.* (6/29/09) (In limited release.)

IN A LONELY PLACE

Nicholas Ray's melodrama, from 1950, is one of the darkest, harshest, most intensely romantic and devastating love stories Hollywood ever produced. It's an inside-Hollywood story, starring Humphrey Bogart (who was never better) as Dixon Steele, a gifted but prickly screenwriter with a mean streak, who meets his dream woman, Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), a fledgling actress, the night that another woman he was with is found murdered. Dix comes under suspicion, and, though Laurel stands by him, circumstances shake her faith. The scandalous clash of movie people with local politics gives the passionate affair a substantial backdrop, as does Ray's fervent depiction of love and work in the life of a fragile, high-strung artist. The director, who was married to Grahame at the time, knew whereof he filmed; his scenes of the feral writer and the feline actress prowling around each other are endowed with a unique bittersweet ardor (which is itself the pretext for a scene about the writing of love scenes). The stars underplay their whiplash dialogue in menacing murmurs, joined by a superbly atmospheric batch of character actors, in such roles as a sentimental agent, a Falstaffian thespian, a wartime buddy in the L.A.P.D., and a wiseacre masseuse, in scenes that play like a bruising form of chamber music, with two-person face-offs, triangular confrontations, and jousting quartets. Few movies suggest such a forthright yet humble flaying of their director's soul.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; July 17-23.)

MACBETH

As seen in this richly detailed restoration of Orson Welles's first Shakespearean film, from 1948, the visionary director employed a stark and gloomy medieval production of the Scottish play to address the horrors of his own times. He takes the setting seriously; the cast (including Welles, in the title role) perform the text—which they prerecorded and lip-synched—in plain speaking voices thick with brogues, on a dark set of forbidding mountains, grim grottoes, and mournful plains, amidst mud and filth, wind and cold, and their own sweat and grime. The Ubuesque grotesqueries of the newly ambitious lord invoke Welles's career-long theme—the comeuppance of the arrogant—but several stunning details reflect another plot, of historical scope. The mountainous hold of the overweening, tyrannical couple suggests nothing so much as Hitler's hollow at Berchtesgaden, and when Macduff learns of his family's slaughter, he wears a shirt of vertical black-and-white stripes reminiscent of those worn by inmates in German concentration camps—and the emphasis Welles places on the role of the English in the campaign against the sanguinary usurper redoubles the parallel. Welles clearly savored the redemptive, penitent madness with which Shakespeare endowed the witches' plaything, as if, safe in victory, he could magnanimously unfurl the conscience of a king who, in fact, displayed none.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; July 18.)

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Dziga Vertov celebrates the dynamic variety of quotidian urban life in his 1929 silent masterpiece, the apex of the symphony-of-the-street movie. Setting a prototype cameraman loose to chronicle an unnamed Soviet metropolis from dawn to dusk, he records the commotion on the boulevard and in the trolley yard, the kinetics of newfangled exercise machines that would fit right into today's infomercials, the goofiness and the chagrin at a bureau that handles both divorce and marriage. A protean stylist, Vertov deploys every device from split and superimposed images to pixelation and freeze frames; his film has wit as well as gusto, a clearheaded lyricism, and a robust, sometimes vaudevillian humor. (Was he the first to cut from a supine woman to a hurtling train?)—*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; July 17.)

MOON

The first full-length from the British director Duncan Jones stars Sam Rockwell and Sam Rockwell, with a cameo by Sam Rockwell; such is the occupational hazard, perhaps, of any film set in a future where cloning is common practice. Rockwell is among the most lively and affable of current stars: a good thing, too, given the amount of time he spends onscreen, and the loneliness with which he has to contend. He plays Sam, an astronaut who is nearing the end of a three-year stint on the lunar surface, where he manages the mining of helium-3, a precious substance that will save the planet Earth. On a routine inspection, he crashes his vehicle, and wakes up in the infirmary; from that point on, the film traces the fragmentation of his sanity, his being, and, worst of all, his employment prospects. He is stuck with himself, and so are we. The over-all design is a clear homage to "2001: A Space Odyssey," not just in the soothing tones of the onboard computer—voiced here, with a sliver of menace, by Kevin Spacey—but also in a willingness to disengage from the mechanism of plot and turn instead, as Kubrick did, to the vaporous metaphysics of the otherworldly. Jones, like his hero, has mastered a complex task—but the story he has to tell is lost in space.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

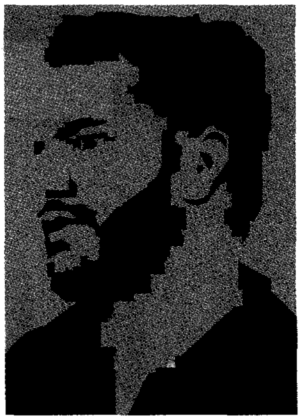
PUBLIC ENEMIES

Michael Mann's ravishing dream of violent gangster life in the thirties. The scowling men in long dark coats and hats, led by the severely elegant John Dillinger (Johnny Depp), march into some grand Midwestern bank, take over the place, throw the cash in bags, and make their getaway, jumping onto the running boards of flat-topped black Fords. The blazing tommy guns emit little spearheads of flame, just as in a comic book. Despite all the violence, the movie is aesthetically shaped and slightly distanced by the pictorial verve of gangland effrontery—the public aggression that Mann makes inseparable from high style. Mann and Depp have made Dillinger a gentleman thug, loyal to his friends and to his

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MIRROR PHASE

Pleasantly perturbing, the retrospective "Dan Graham: Beyond," at the Whitney, tracks the forty-four-year career of a strange paladin of the post-minimalist generation. Graham's works are orthodox in their taciturn style and often bizarre in effect. His lovely, recondite "pavilions"—roomlike sculptures in reflective glass, often designed for outdoor sites—achieve a public art that tends to mystify even art-world insiders. Entering one imposes an obscure sense of responsibility on the viewer, stirring the thought, O.K., now what? Indoor installations of two-way mirrors and time-delay video cast viewers as laboratory rats, with mild amusement as cheese. Graham's weird charm registers most pungently in "Rock My Religion," a nearly hour-long quasi-documentary that combines homages to punk rockers and to the New England Shakers—as avatars, it seems, of a peculiarly deliberate, oddly chaste frenzy of transcendence. (Never thought Shakers and mosh pits had much in common? Check it out.) Graham's quirks bemuse as they beguile.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



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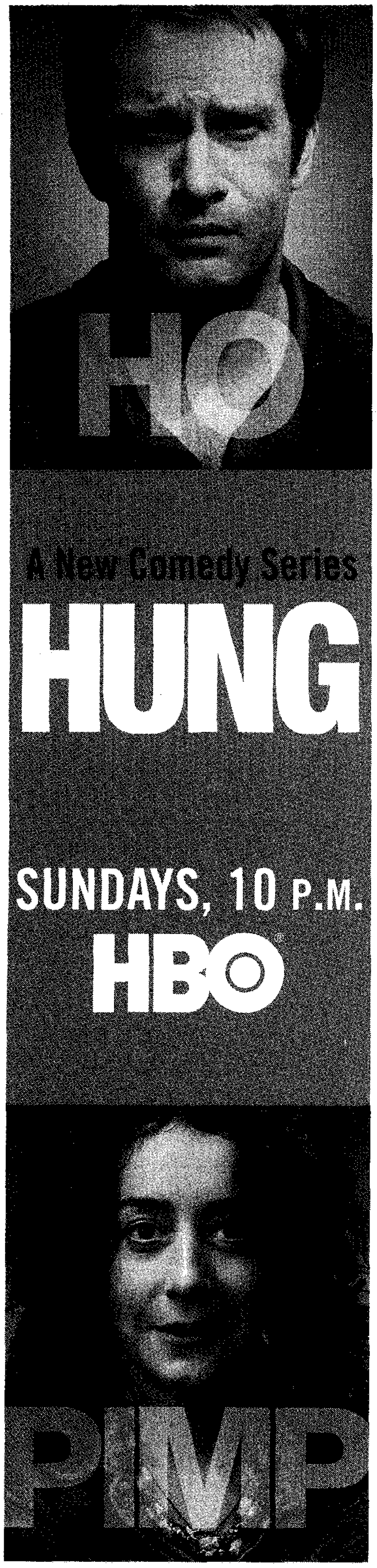

hatcheck girlfriend, Billie Frechette, played by Marion Cotillard with a combination of desperate hope and fear that is enormously appealing. The movie chronicles not only Dillinger's wild final months but the parallel rise of organized crime and the F.B.I. With his cheekbones built up and his handsome features on the verge of disappearing into jowls, Billy Crudup plays the young but already insufferable J. Edgar Hoover as a bullying, righteous, and wary man, a natural-born populist authoritarian. One of Mann's wittiest accomplishments is to recapture the stiffly formal side of official life in the thirties—the sound of a newly powerful country trying to impress itself with its own importance. With the dour Christian Bale as Melvin Purvis, who commanded the pursuit of Dillinger.—*D.D.* (7/6 & 13/09) (In wide release.)

QUIET CHAOS

Antonello Grimaldi's touching and original study of isolation and grief chronicles the way that an intelligent man, Pietro Paladini (Nanni Moretti), a media executive refusing solace from religion or therapy, deals with the sudden death of his wife in a freak accident. Devoted to his ten-year-old daughter, he camps outside her school all day long, ignoring the important merger his company is involved in. He gives himself over not to mourning but to building a new, grounded life from many individual acts of observation and judgment. He sees all his intimates differently—either as neurotic and dishonest or as surprisingly benevolent. Moretti (himself a notable writer-director) dominates every scene; he has the unique quality of never being boring despite doing very little. A startling erotic episode serves as a kind of return to life. Moretti, Laura Paolucci, and Francesco Piccolo adapted Sandro Veronesi's novel. With Alessandro Gassman, Valeria Golino, and Isabella Ferrari. In Italian.—*D.D.* (IFC Center.)

TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

Two sets of leaden-voiced plastic-and-metal monsters, the Autobots and the Decepticons, having failed to settle their differences over a parking space on an alien planet, fight it out on Earth—with human beings, in the dubious form of the teen couple Shia LaBeouf and Megan Fox, in the middle. Apart from the frustrating truth that it's impossible, much of the time, to tell the warring creatures apart—both kinds are huge, black, gleaming, and clanking, with many arms and appendages—they obey no rules that would make their combats a struggle of courage against limitation and therefore worth caring about. Achilles and Hector had spears and shields. These things can fly, climb, bash things, bore holes, change shape back into cars or trucks, dance the cancan in the pre-First World War Folies-Bergère. There isn't much they can't do, and their endless struggles are redundant and undifferentiated. Directed by the stunningly, almost viciously untalented Michael Bay.—*D.D.* (7/6 & 13/09) (In wide release.)

THE VANISHED EMPIRE

Back in the U.S.S.R., they didn't know how lucky they were—so, at least, says Karen Shakhnazarov, in this sentimental drama about growing up in Moscow in the early nineteen-seventies, in the age of Brezhnev. His eighteen-year-old protagonist, Sergey, charmingly deluded by the selfishness and vanity fed to him by the bluejeans, rock and roll, consumer goods, and even (gasp!) marijuana filtering in illicitly from the decadent West, screws up his love life, his studies, and his family relations, under the benign gaze of authorities who care little that he bills himself "a democrat and a dissident" and thumbs his nose openly at dogma. Happily, the director embeds his message-mongering in a vision of adolescence that seems to be not far from his own. First love, family ties, an impulse for adventure, and the universally anarchic teen spirit survive even the script's ham-fisted claims to dominion over now independent states. In Russian.—*R.B.* (Quad Cinema.)

Also Playing

I LOVE YOU, BETH COOPER: In wide release. **ICE AGE: DAWN OF THE DINOSAURS:** In wide release. **THE PROPOSAL:** In wide release. **YOO HOO, MRS. GOLDBERG:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Robert Kramer. July 17 at 6:45: "In the Country" (1966). ♦ July 17 at 8:30 and July 18 at 3:15: "Milestones" (1975, Kramer and John Douglas). ♦ July 18 at 7 and July 20 at 8:45: "Ice" (1969). ♦ July 18 at 9:30 and July 21 at 7: "FALN" (1965, Kramer and Peter Gessner) and "The People's War" (1969). ♦ July 19 at 2 and July 21 at 8:30: "Scenes from the Class Struggle in Portugal" (1979). ♦ July 19 at 4:15 and July 20 at 6:30: "The Edge" (1967). ♦ July 19 at 6:30: "Route One/USA" (1989). ♦ Films by Kenneth Anger. July 18 and 19 at 7:30: Ten short films, including "My Surfing Lucifer" (2008). ♦ July 19 at 5:30: "Fireworks" (1947), "Rabbit's Moon" (1950-70), and "Scorpio Rising" (1963).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. July 15 and 16 at 6:45 and 9:30: "Mississippi Mermaid" (1969, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ July 17-19 at 3 and 7 and July 20-21 at 7: "Kagemusha" (1980, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. July 15-16 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Alien" (1979, Ridley Scott). ♦ Through August 6: the films of Nicholas Ray. July 17-23 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "In a Lonely Place" (†).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Shakespeare on film. July 15 at 1:15 and 6:15: "Henry V" (1944, Laurence Olivier). ♦ July 15 at 4 and July 19 at 9:10: "Throne of Blood" (1957, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ July 15 at 9, July 16 at 1, and July 19 at 6:20: "Romeo and Juliet" (1968, Franco Zeffirelli). ♦ July 16 at 3:45 and 9:15 and July 19 at 4: "Hamlet" (2000, Michael Almereyda). ♦ July 16 at 6:15 and July 19 at 1: "The Maori Merchant of Venice" (2002, Don Selwyn; in Maori). ♦ July 18 and July 20 at 1: "Antony and Cleopatra" (1972, Charlton Heston). ♦ July 18 at 4:15 and July 20 at 3:20: "King Lear" (1971, Grigory Kozintsev; in Russian). ♦ July 18 at 7: "Macbeth"(†). ♦ July 18 at 9:30: "The Angelic Conversation" (1985, Derek Jarman). ♦ July 21 at 2: "Macbeth" (1971, Roman Polanski). ♦ "Golden Silents." July 17 at 7: "Man with a Movie Camera" (†), accompanied by the Alloy Orchestra. ♦ "*Film Comment* Selects." July 20 at 7:30: "Thirst" (2009, Park Chan-wook; in Korean).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Michel Piccoli. July 21 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Woman in Blue" (1973, Michel Deville; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Movie Nights with Jem Cohen." July 15 at 7:30: "Film and the Folk/Punk Connection." ♦ "Waverly Midnights." July 17-18: "The Blair Witch Project" (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Critical Favorites: The New York Film Critics Circle at 75." July 15 at 4:30: "Spellbound" (1945, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ July 15 at 8: "The Lion in Winter" (1968, Anthony Harvey). ♦ "Première Brazil 2009." All films are in Portuguese. July 16 at 4:30: "You, Me, and Him" (2008, Daniel Ribeiro) and "That's It" (2008, Matheus Souza). ♦ July 16 at 8: "Last Stop 174" (2008, Bruno Barreto). ♦ July 17 at 5: "Should Nothing Else Work Out" (2008, José Eduardo Belmonte). ♦ July 17 at 8: "Beyond Ipanema: Brazilian Waves in Global Music" (2009, Guto Barra). ♦ July 18 at 2: "69-Luz Square" (2008, Carolina Markowicz and Joana Galvão) and "Youth" (2008, Domingos Oliveira). ♦ July 18 at 6: "The Enchanted Word" (2008, Helena Solberg). ♦ July 18 at 8: "December" (2008, Selton Mello). ♦ July 19 at 2:30: "Cinderellas, Wolves, and a Prince Charming" (2008, Joel Zito Araújo). ♦ July 19 at 5: "Contretemps" (2008, Malu Mader and Mini Kerti). ♦ July 19 at 8: "Twenty Years Later—A Man Labeled to Die" (1964/1984, Eduardo Coutinho). ♦ July 20 at 4:30: "Moscow" (2009, Coutinho). ♦ July 20 at 8: "Morrinho: God Knows Everything but Is Not a Snitch" (2008, Fébio Gavião and Markão Oliveira).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Aug. 30: "French New Wave Essentials." All screenings will be held at the Museum of Arts and Design, 2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777). July 18-19 at 2: "The 400 Blows" (1959, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ July 18-19 at 4: ". . . And God Created Woman" (1956, Roger Vadim; in French).

READINGS AND TALKS

"FANTASTIC FICTION"
The science-fiction writers Samuel R. Delany, Jack Womack, Cat Rambo, Kris Dikeman, and Rajan Khanna offer a selection of their work, in a program celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Clarion West Writers Workshop for aspiring science-fiction and fantasy authors. (KGB Bar, 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. July 15 at 7.)

92ND STREET Y
The writer Shaul Bakhash moderates "Iran: A Conversation About the Elections, Protest, and the Future," with the *Times* columnist Roger Cohen, the Iranian political analyst Haleh Esfandiari, and Karim Sadjadpour, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-868-4444. July 15 at 7.)

"SUMMER SCOOPS"
The Wall Street Journal has organized a series of talks about popular culture. On July 15 at 7:30, it presents "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans," with the trumpeter Terence Blanchard, the singer Tammy Lynn, and Ira Padnos, the founder of the Crescent City music festival Ponderosa Stomp. They will be in conversation with the jazz journalist Larry Blumenfeld. (Kaplan Penthouse, Lincoln Center. For more information, visit www.wsj.com/live.)

BOOKCOURT
Jonathan Ames reads from his latest collection of essays and short fiction, "The Double Life Is Twice as Good." (163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. July 16 at 7.)

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ
The poets and Beat scholars Valery Oisteanu and Kat Georges host a tribute to the writer Harold Norse, an associate of William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso, who wrote, among other things, the experimental novel "Beat Hotel," and who died last month. Ira Cohen, Max Blagg, Jeffrey Cyphers Wright, Steve Dalachinsky, Shelley Miller, Angelo Verga, Tom Walker, and other friends and fans of Norse are expected. (29 Cornelia St. Tickets at the door. July 20 at 6.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE CONEY ISLAND BOOM A RING CIRCUS
Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey rolls into Brooklyn with a one-ring summer extravaganza. (Surf Ave. and W. 21st St. 800-745-3000. Through Sept. 7.)

NYC MUSICAL SAW FESTIVAL
The carpenter's saw, which became a folk-music staple in the mid-nineteenth century, experienced its greatest popularity during the days of vaudeville, as a novelty instrument. Its fortunes declined following the Second World War, but Natalia Paruz, who calls herself the Saw Lady and has played the instrument everywhere from the subways to Avery Fisher Hall, is doing her part to revive the saw and its gossamer, voicelike sound. She organizes this annual gathering, which draws aficionados from all over the world for an afternoon of music and instruction. This year's festival includes an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the largest musical-saw ensemble (the current record, set last year in Poland, stands at twenty-seven). (Trinity Church, 31-18 37th St., Astoria, Queens. July 18 at 2. For more information, visit www.musicalsawfestival.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Forty years ago this month, Neil Armstrong, the moon's first human visitor, was gliding and skipping on its surface. Today space travel is an almost banal component of our shared consciousness, but seeing the images from that 1969 event still boggles the mind. This feeling of wonder is at the root of the enthusiasm for space memorabilia, fuelled by auctions like the one held at **Bonhams** on July 16. The timely sale features several items from Apollo 11, including a checklist detailing the descent sequence followed by Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin during the first landing. A few lots in the sale, such as a brush used on the Apollo 14 mission to wipe off the lenses of television cameras during moon walks, are coated in that most heavenly of substances, moon dust. (580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. 212-644-9001.)

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PASCAL BLANCHET

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PAPERS, PLEASE
July 25-Aug. 24

Gian Carlo Menotti's "The Consul," the most acclaimed of his many operas, is a classic Cold War melodrama, but its plot, about a desperate woman trying to protect her husband from the tentacles of a police state, could have been plucked from today's headlines. Glimmerglass Opera presents a production by Sam Helfrich, who scored a hit there with his staging of Philip Glass's "Orphée" in 2007. (www.glimmerglass.org.)

THE THEATRE
SISTER STORY
July 28

Primary Stages kicks off its season dedicated to female playwrights with the world première of a new play by Cusi Cram, "A Lifetime Burning." Jennifer Westfeldt and Isabel Keating star in the comedy, about two sisters dealing with a falsified memoir. Pam MacKinnon directs. (212-279-4200.)

ART
STREETWISE
Aug. 2-Jan. 4

The Bronx's Grand Concourse turns a hundred this year. To celebrate the centennial, the Bronx Museum has commissioned a series of photographs by the New York artist Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao, including a pair of huge panoramas measuring a hundred and twenty-eight feet wide. (718-681-6000.)

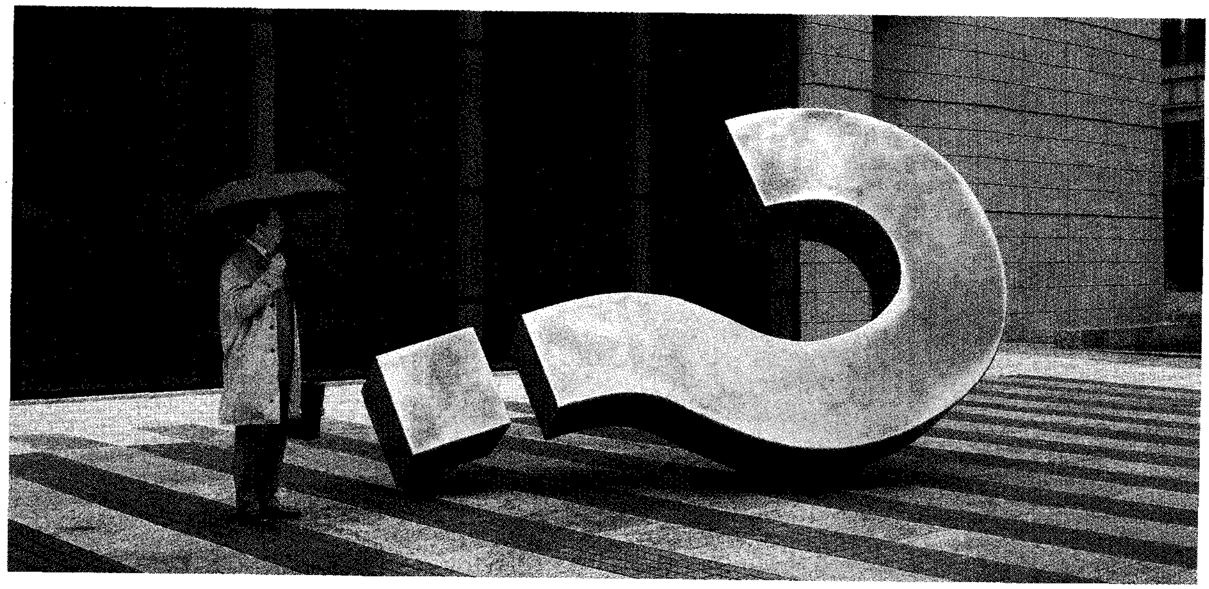
NIGHT LIFE
SUMMER SOUNDS
Aug. 4

The summer season is already under way at the city's newest outdoor venue, the Beach at Governors Island, but the concerts will really heat up next month, when the eclectic neo-soul singer Erykah Badu takes the stage. (www.govislandconcerts.com.)

MOVIES
THE ANGLO FILES
Aug. 7-Sept. 3

Crime is everywhere, and the British cinema has long made hay of it with a series of moody and violent melodramas. The monthlong "Brit Noir" program, at Film Forum, features such darkly evocative titles as "Hell Is a City," "The Good Die Young," "So Evil My Love," and "She Played with Fire." (212-727-8110.)

Gian Carlo Menotti's "The Consul," at Glimmerglass.



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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE GLORIOUS THIRD

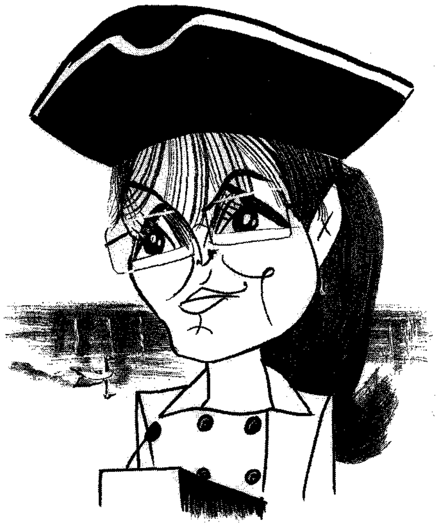
Sara, Sara,
Whatever made you want to change your mind?
Sara, Sara,
So easy to look at, so hard to define.

—Bob Dylan, "Sara."

Sarah Palin spells her Christian name a letter longer than the singer spells his muse's, but her whims are likewise elusive and her motives similarly mysterious. Ever since the 2008 Republican nominee for Vice-President of the United States suddenly announced that she would resign the governorship of Alaska at the end of July, nearly sixteen months before the expiration of what was supposed to be her first term, a single question has been on every lip: What on earth was *that* all about?

No one knows. Speculation, some of it fact-based, abounds. She is sick of politics. Or she's just sick of Alaska politics and wants to do her politicking in the Lower 48. Or she wants to run for senator next year. Or she wants to help other Republicans running for senator or governor in other states, with a view to collecting Presidential I.O.U.s. Or she needs time to coach the ghostwriter and promote the product of a cash-rich book project she recently signed a contract for. Or she thinks the Alaska legislature is getting stroppy (e.g., it might override her refusal to accept millions in federal stimulus funds) and figures it's better to let her lieutenant governor take the fall. Or she wants to fish more. Or there's an asteroid-size scandal hurtling her way, and she wants to be outside the blast area when it detonates. Or there's no big scandal, just a lot of little ones that aren't even true but nonetheless require the services of lawyers too pricey to retain on a government salary. Or she's bored. Or (though she is one of the few political job-quitters in memory *not* to have given this as a reason, as well as one of the few who could say it plausibly) she wants to spend time with her family.

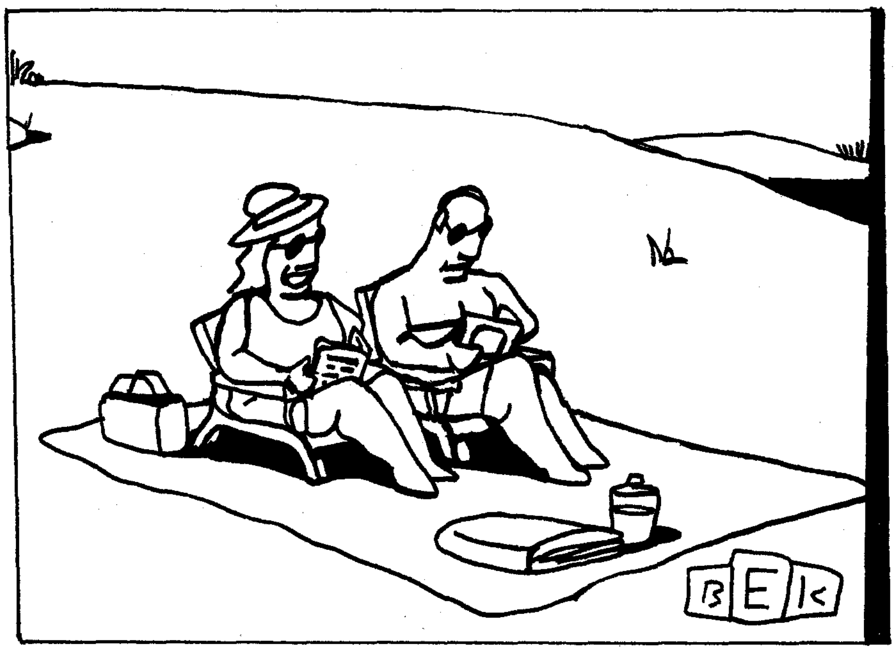
"Some are going to question the timing of this," Governor Palin predicted in her speech. Sure enough, some did—and no wonder. The Governor made her announcement at the start of a holiday weekend. The setting—the lawn of her lakeshore home, with geese honking in the background and, for an audience, a sparse scattering of standing supporters in knit shirts and shorts—suggested haste. So did the fact that the press was given less than two hours' notice, while her in-laws, her state's congressional delegation, and the grandees of the state and national Republican Party, including the former running mate who elevated her to global fame, were given no notice at all.



The questioners of the timing included a reporter from *Time*, who, in one of the damage-control interviews Palin gave last week, asked her, "Why make the announcement on July 3rd?" and added, a little apologetically, "People assume scandal." The Governor, after expressing indignation that anyone might think she was quitting for other than "altruistic, sincere, and articulated reasons," replied, in part, "July 3rd is the eve of Independence Day. It is meaningful to be able to say: Look, there needs to be freedom all the way around here to progress."

It may be inferred from this that Palin sees a certain parallel between the events of July 3, 2009, and those of July 4, 1776. And, indeed, her speech had echoes of the document signed in Philadelphia two hundred and thirty-three years and one day earlier. "Let Facts be submitted to a candid world," proclaims Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. "I've given my reasons now, very candidly," proclaims Palin's. Both support "life"—in Jefferson's case, as part of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," in Palin's, as a component of "free enterprise and smaller government and strong national security for our country and support for our troops and en-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"I love my unreliable narrator. You?"

• •

ergy independence and for those who will protect freedom and equality and life."

Here's Jefferson on political change:

> Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Here's Palin on same:

> Government's supposed to serve from the bottom up and not move towards this top-down, big-government takeover, but rather will be protectors of individual rights, who also have enough common sense to acknowledge when conditions have drastically changed, and they're willing to call an audible and pass the ball when it's time so the team can win.

In Palin's case, the government that she was declaring independence from is the one that she herself is governor of. She was therefore in the awkward position of having to argue that she has had "so much success in this first term" (e.g., "We took government out of the dairy business") that "doing what's best for Alaska" requires her to abandon her post. But the bulk of the Wasilla declaration, like the bulk of the Philadelphia one, was devoted to the enumeration of what the latter's author called "a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object"—the Object being, in Sarah Palin's case, making things hard for Sarah Palin.

The colonists' catalogue of complaints against George III ranged from "He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good" to "He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people."

The Governor's complaints against "adversaries" and "enemies" were more humdrum:

> You don't hear much about the good stuff in the press anymore, though, do you?
>
> Political operatives descended on Alaska last August, digging for dirt.
>
> The state has wasted thousands of hours of your time and shelled out some two million of your dollars to respond to opposition research. And that's money that's not going to fund teachers or troopers or safer roads.

But the evidence suggests that she is thinking not so much about Alaska's money (the Anchorage *Daily News* found that the two-million-dollar figure relies on extremely creative accounting, and that not a cent has been diverted from teachers and the like) as about her own (and not the money that she has spent on lawyers, most of which has been supplied by others, but the payday that awaits her in private life). Levi Johnston, the nineteen-year-old father of Palin's grandchild, has offered some testimony on this subject. Last Thursday, at a press conference at his lawyer's office (in Palin's circle, nineteen-year-olds have lawyers and hold press conferences), Johnston recalled his then prospective mother-in-law musing about "how nice it would be to take some of this money people have been offering us and, y'know, just run with it. . . . I think the big deal was the book. That's millions of dollars right there."

"Levi," a reporter put in, "say Sarah Palin ran for President in 2012. Would you vote for her?"

Johnston sighed. "No," he said. "I think she's a great lady and all, but after seeing what she did now—you know, this leaving Alaska—I would have to say no. I mean, obviously if she's stressed out as governor, I mean, moving up to the Vice-President or President is huge. I just don't think, anymore, that she's cut out for the job."

Back in 1776, the signers of the Philadelphia declaration pledged, among other things, their fortunes. The Wasilla rebel stands to make one. Perhaps more than that, though, being governor simply isn't any fun anymore. And this is one girl from the north country who just wants to have fun.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF TRANSIENTS
ANOTHER OBAMA?

People who like the Ecuadoran President, Rafael Correa, describe him this way: environmentalist, speaker of five languages, Ph.D. (in economics) from the University of Illinois, solidifier of a once unstable country, writer of a new constitution, corruption fighter, canceller of debt, a "young, handsome, and shrewd" reformer who—as Fenton Communications, the Washington, D.C., P.R. firm that the government of Ecuador has hired to help Correa polish his profile in America, pointed out recently—has been called "the Obama of Latin America." People who don't like him have their own ideas: Chávez crony, wild card, antagonist of America, whom the *Wall Street Journal* has likened to Fidel Castro, and under whose rule, the paper said, "liberty has been evaporating faster than you can say *bolivariano*."

Amid the encomiums and the slurs, it was interesting, the other day, to hear Correa speak for himself. Tanned, and wearing an embroidered shirt, he greeted a reporter at the Ecuadoran Consulate with a kiss on each cheek and a grin. The first question was about Iran—President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad flew to Quito, in 2007, to attend Correa's inauguration. Correa's smile gave way to a smolder. He said, in Spanish, "The opposition is unhappy about the election results. But our chargé d'affaires tells us that the difference obtained in votes by President Ahmadinejad is actually quite big. Polls indicated that he was going to be the winner."

Correa, who calls himself a "humanist and Christian of the left," was in town for less than twenty-four hours, to speak at the United Nations about the financial crisis. After landing at 7 A.M. in a chartered plane, he had delivered a fiery speech to the General Assembly, declaring himself a representative of "a Cinderella-like humiliated continent." Correa quoted the Spanish erotic poet Juan Ramón Jiménez ("They wanted to kill him, / the equals, / because he was different"), defended the Palestinians, excoriated what he termed "the Washington consensus" ("a paradoxical and cynical agreement signed behind the backs of peoples and governments and limited to the conclaves of the dominating and colonialist powers"), and called, ultimately, for a sort of coalition of "the different"—the poor, the oppressed, the ignored—that would assert "the preëminence of human beings over capital." After the speech, he invoked the *Journal* article, which had also alleged that his government maintained ties to Colombia's FARC rebels. "We will sue this newspaper, because we are sick of their lies," he said.

At four o'clock, Correa held a press conference at the Ecuadoran Consulate. There were *banderas* hanging from the ceiling, and, near the door, a woman offered Dixie cups of Güitig, an Ecuadoran mineral water. In selling his agenda—which consists of five things: a new constitution (accomplished), boosting the economy, social development, *la lucha contra la corrupción*, and Latin-American integration—Correa seemed to rely on a combination of personal magnetism (his grins and scowls could have been a good-cop, bad-cop routine) and an academic's knack for statistics (such as: "Before, you would win on the first round of elections with only twenty-three per cent, twenty-five per cent of the vote, but we won with fifty-two per cent"). The Ecuadoran constitution, which was ratified in 2008, is probably the only one in the world to accord natural rights to the environment (from its Rights for Nature: "Nature, or Pachamama . . . has the right to persist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions, and its processes in evolution").

At seven o'clock, Correa was due at Our Lady of Sorrows church in Corona, Queens. He was late, but no one seemed to care. The scene resembled a block party, with an ice-cream truck at the curb, and supporters in bright T-shirts featuring the slogan "*Inmigrantes con Correa!*," along with Correa's likeness, in the style of Shepard Fairey's Obama. The Presidents had exchanged handshakes at the Summit of the Americas, in April, and Obama called Correa to congratulate him on his reëlection in June. But, at the consulate, Correa had said that he doesn't pay much attention to domestic American politics. Asked about the Mark Sanford scandal, he turned to an aide and said, "Which one of the many scandals is that?"

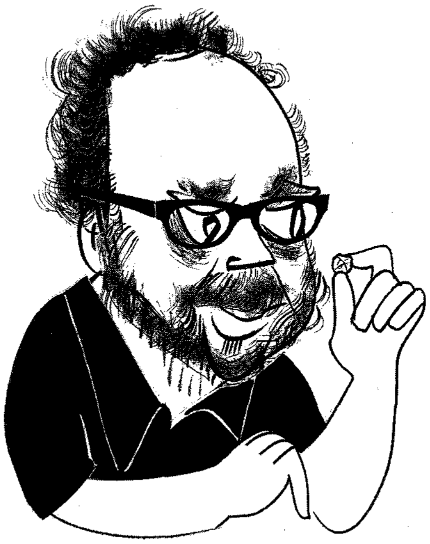
Correa had been in New York twice before. His favorite place in the city is Times Square. "There's a lot of technology, it's the center of capitalism," he said. "I don't mean that I *like* it. It's very interesting for me." Correa had not had much time to see the sights. "Obviously, it's an impressive city," he continued. "Fifth Avenue, the Empire State Building, Broadway." Last time, he had seen "Phantom of the Opera"—"It was wonderful," he said.

—*Lauren Collins*

THE PICTURES
SOUL MAN

Paul Giamatti does not look like a great-souled man. The vexed-seeming star of "Sideways" and "John Adams" roams his home streets of Brooklyn Heights with his arms crossed, glaring at strangers. In the film "Cold Souls," which opens next month, he plays an actor named Paul Giamatti, who, burdened by nameless anxieties, has his soul extracted by an outfit called the Soul Storage Company. To Giamatti's chagrin, his soul turns out to be much smaller than anyone else's. In fact, it greatly resembles a chickpea.

The film's writer-director, Sophie Barthes, wrote "Cold Souls" based on a dream she had in which Woody Allen's extracted soul resembled a chickpea. Over lunch at a Brooklyn Heights café recently, Giamatti said that if Allen had played himself the chickpea thing would have been funny. "I'm not sure what it does that it's me instead—does it keep people in a slightly agitated state?" he wondered. "Because that's the persona I have, and that's what they keep asking me to do, and what I keep bringing, because I figure they want it: agitated guy."



Paul Giamatti

In the film, Soul Storage is part of a Russian-American trafficking network, and Giamatti's soul—which he thought was secure in a lockbox on Roosevelt Island—ends up in the body of a Russian starlet. Her trafficker husband has it stolen for her, in the belief that it's Al Pacino's. "I think Al Pacino has stretched his soul, more so than maybe I have," Giamatti said. "So his soul would be more elastic. It's a liquid, an oily liquid that gets into cracks and crevices, but also has some body to it, so he can do that 'Hoo ha!' thing." Giamatti's rendition of "Hoo ha!" was mournful and slightly sneezy.

As he sipped chicken soup, reputed to pep up the soul, he grew less agitated. "I'd like to try Willie Nelson's soul for a day," he volunteered. "It would be like an ear of roasted corn. And I go to Dolly Parton, for some reason—her soul would be light and airy, like a hummingbird. Yes, I like the idea of having a country singer's soul. But not Merle Haggard's—it'd be an engine block. Powerful, but kind of rusty, with lots of buildup.

"Freud would be interesting," he continued. "I'm seeing a piece of Babylonian statuary, with the curly beard, the half-a-lion, the wings. Or Donald Trump: a nice set of whitewall tires." To Giamatti's surprise, he was also drawn, like many another, to the apparently soulless Jessica Simpson: "I can't get a read off of her, which is why I'm curious. Her soul might just be a tape measure." He drew the line at the guitar player Slash, "a blood orange left on a windowsill, all dried out and leathery"; Kim Jong Il, "a crazy box of crabs"; and Henry Kissinger, "a doorknob."

Giamatti leaned back. "What about the Pope? Presumably, it's part of the job description to have a lot of soul. This guy is a tough read, though—he's like Jessica Simpson. I just see a glass of water with this guy." He shrugged. "But, on the other hand—refreshing the people. Maybe it's a bottomless glass."

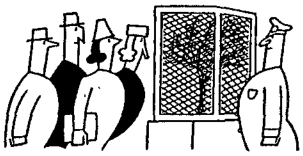
Continuing around the continent on a kind of astral Eurail pass, he said, "Berlusconi . . . I'm seeing a heavily lacquered coffee table. No good. Tolstoy would be a great one: he could jump right across the way into anybody. And Sarkozy—if I had Sarkozy's soul, Carla Bruni would fly over, drawn to me like the arrow point of a compass, and get in my bathtub and sing."

What would Giamatti's own soul resemble? "If people judged it off the movies, they would see something spiny—a sea urchin," he said. He observed, however, that that's not really him. "People would be surprised, but I have a certain low-level machismo," he said, grinning for the first time. "I remember being up for a scrap in the schoolyard, and I can take a punch." His shoulders shifted pugnaciously. "I'm always surprised, when I do movies, at how eager I am to throw myself out of a moving car. I don't look like it, but I've got a little 'Hoo ha!' in me."

If his soul isn't a chickpea or a sea urchin, then what is it? "I'm seeing a hand-painted ceramic toad," Giamatti said. "A nice one, though. Not a crappy Chia Pet one. Something decorative for the yard. It doesn't pull the room together or anything, but it's out there, and occasionally you notice it and you say, 'Oh, I kind of like that thing, that—what is it?—that toad thing.' "

—*Tad Friend*

ON THE STREET
DIAL-A-TREE



Right now on the Grand Concourse, in the Bronx, there's this thing called the Tree Museum. This is a public work of conceptual art consisting of a hundred individual trees next to or near the Grand Concourse along its five-mile route through the heart of the Bronx. Beside each tree on the sidewalk is a small light-green marker with a telephone number. The Tree Museum-goer calls the number on a cell phone, punches in that particular tree's extension, and hears a recording about the tree, or the neighborhood, or the Concourse, or the Bronx, or some larger concept like global warming. A visual artist named Katie Holten came up with the idea of the Tree Museum and put it together as part of the Concourse's centennial. Going from marked tree to marked tree and calling their numbers is a strangely addictive experience, possibly related to primal hunting and gathering.

Tree No. 1 is a London plane by an off-ramp of the Major Deegan Expressway at East 138th Street, where the Grand Concourse begins. Dial the number on the marker, then "1" and the pound sign, and a poet named E. J. McAdams recites a haiku he has written about a grove of pines near the London plane tree. Tree No. 2 is a pin oak beside a nearby entrance to the 4 and 5 trains. The pin oak's recording does not mention the polite and well-spoken drug dealer standing under the tree; like the Tree Museum-goer, he is on the phone. Tree No. 3 is an ancient, lofty ailanthus growing out of the base of an apartment building. The Chinese used the bark and the seeds of the ailanthus to treat baldness and mental illness, the recording says. A man in the house next to the ailanthus comes out to say how wonderful the tree's shade is on hot summer days, when he and his friends sit in folding chairs on the sidewalk.

Tree No. 17, near 150th Street, is the stump of an elm that was at least seventy-five when it was cut down, last year. Its recording is of Jon Pywell, a forester with the Department of Parks and Recreation, who says that the tree's outer rings show damage, perhaps from careless snow removal or sidewalk construction twenty-five years ago. (The Bronx itself, one recalls, was not doing too well twenty-five years ago.) Tree No. 21 is a Kwanzan cherry in, aptly, Joyce Kilmer Park. Dialling the number and the extension produced a recording: "I'm sorry. That command is not valid." Nearby on a bench a woman is going through a girl's long dark hair, strand by strand, as the girl lies with her head in the woman's lap.

Tree No. 23 is a Callery pear (perhaps misidentified; it looks more like a honey locust) at 162nd Street, across the Concourse from a large, two-towered brick building. The recording says that it used to be the Concourse Plaza Hotel, where Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and Whitey Ford lived sometimes. Now it's a residence for senior citizens. Just down the hill to the west, you can see the tops of both Yankee Stadiums. Tree No. 42, at 170th Street, is a little-leaf linden that, according to the local beekeeper on the recording, attracts many bees at this time of year. The beekeeper extolls the clarity and the flavor of linden-blossom honey. Tree No. 55, a honey locust, is across from a flatiron building, formerly called the Medical Arts Building, that was here before the construction of the Grand Concourse, says the voice of the official Bronx historian, Lloyd Ultan. As the museumgoer crosses 178th Street, rain begins to pour. Protected under the hoardings on the front of an apartment building, three young men are listening to rap music and drinking beer and playing dominoes. They are sitting in old-fashioned wooden office chairs, the kind that swivel and tilt back on springs.

Caterpillars of the Question Mark butterfly like to feed on the leaves of the hackberry, Tree No. 67, that tree's recording says. A man eating a West Indian meat pie comes up to the museumgoer at 188th Street and asks, "Hey, papi, can you help me out? I just got out of jail." At a London plane—Tree No. 92—an M.I.T.-trained architect talks about making edible houses from living trees. At

No. 95, a Norway maple, the recording is of a geologist who draws the museumgoer's attention to an outcropping of 1.1-billion-year-old gneiss protruding between two residential buildings nearby. Just up the Concourse, partyers are dancing on a patio sheltered by a blue tarp, from whose edge merengue music and clouds of barbecue smoke spill out. And at Tree No. 100, a cottonwood beside Mosholu Parkway, at the Concourse's northern end, the recording tells how neighborhood activists saved this tree from destruction and created the little park around it. The cottonwood is a majestic four-trunk specimen, something you might find in Montana on the banks of the Missouri River. In the breeze its leaves shiver silvery-green against the Bronx sky.

—*Ian Frazier*

FISH TALES
CLUPEOPHILIA

Anyone on the sixteenth floor of the Roger Smith Hotel, in midtown, at five-forty-five on a recent June afternoon would have seen a puzzling assemblage of people in the corridor: a construction worker from Brooklyn, a mathematics professor from Princeton, a couple from Aruba, a father with an infant strapped to his chest, and an artist from the Lower East Side. It wasn't immediately apparent what had brought this seemingly random slice of humanity together. Had one come up in the service elevator, though, an unmistakable aroma would have given a vital clue. By five-fifty-nine, almost sixty people had gathered in the hallway.

At six, the doors to an event room opened and the crowd rushed in. There, in the middle of the room, lighted, draped, surmounted by a huge glittering block of ice, was an altar: an altar covered with hundreds of fresh herring, the first of the season, just flown in from Holland. This was an altar consecrated to Clupeus, the god of herring, whose annual festival is celebrated in late spring by herring-lovers the world over.

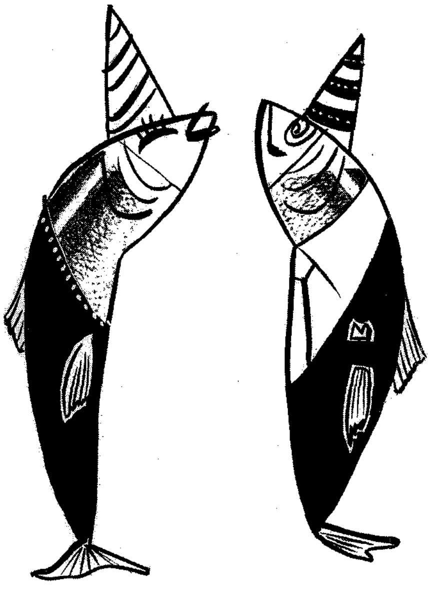
Entire books have been published about cod, about eel, about tuna, but relatively little has been written about herring. (There is, however, a delightful book by Mike Smylie, "Herring: A History of the Silver Darlings," and a fascinating chapter in W. G. Sebald's "The Rings of Saturn.") But herring have played a great part in human history. In the Middle Ages, they were carefully graded and priced by the Hanseatic League, and supported fisheries in the Baltic and the North Sea—and, later, in Newfoundland and on the Pacific Coast. Herring are one of the commonest, cheapest, and most delicious fish on the planet—a fish that can take an infinity of forms: marinated, pickled, salted, fermented, smoked, or, as with the exquisite Hollandse Nieuwe, straight from the sea. They are one of the healthiest fish, too, full of omega-3 oils, and without the mercury that accumulates in the big predators like tuna and swordfish. A few years ago, the oldest person in the world, a hundred-and-fourteen-year-old Dutch woman, said she attributed her longevity to eating pickled herring every day. (A hundred-and-fourteen-year-old woman from Texas attributed her long life to "minding my own business.")

There are many species of Clupeidae, with varying sizes and tastes, from the Atlantic herring, *Clupea harengus*, to the pilchard (much loved in England, and often served in tomato sauce), to the tiny sprat, best smoked and eaten bones and all. When I grew up in England, in the nineteen-thirties, we had herring virtually every day: smoked herring (kippers or bloaters) at breakfast, perhaps a herring pie at lunch (my mother's favorite dish), fried herring roe on toast at teatime, chopped herring at dinner. But times have changed, herring is no longer on every breakfast and dinner table, and it is only on special, joyous occasions that we clupeophiles can come together for a real herring feast.

The great traditions of herring are maintained by Russ & Daughters, a Houston Street emporium that started as a pushcart on the Lower East Side, nearly a century ago, and still sells the largest variety of herring in New York City. It was Russ & Daughters that organized the recent herring festival.

There are certain passions—one wants to call them innocent, ingenuous passions—that are great democratizers. Baseball, music, and bird-watching come immediately to mind. At the herring festival, there was no talk about the stock market, or gossiping about celebrities. People had come to eat herring—to savor them, to compare them. In its purest form, this meant seizing the new herring by the tail and lowering them gently into the mouth. The sensation this produces is voluptuous, especially as they slip down the throat.

Guests started from the great central table, the altar covered with new herring; washed these down with aquavit; and moved on to satellite tables, where there were *matjes* herring, herring in wine sauce, herring in cream sauce, Bismarck herring, herring in mustard sauce, herring in curry sauce, and plump schmaltz herring, fresh from Iceland. Oily and briny, schmaltz herring can last for twenty years; taken from the Baltic, they were a staple food (along with black bread, potatoes, and cabbage) of poor Jews throughout Eastern Europe. For my father, born in Lithuania, there was nothing to compare with them, and he ate them daily all his life.



Around eight o'clock, after two hours of eating and drinking, the pace slackened. Slowly, the herring-lovers left the hotel, still discussing favorite dishes with fellow-travellers as they went. They sauntered slowly up Lexington Avenue. One does not rush after such a banquet; indeed, one's whole perspective on the world is changed. Some of us, the New Yorkers, will meet again, at Russ & Daughters. But the rest, after they have slept the deep sleep of the consummated herring-eater, will start counting the days to the herring festival of 2010.

—*Oliver Sacks*

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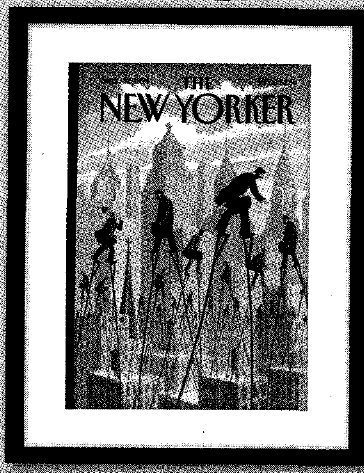

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

ENTER LAUGHING

Senator Franken's long journey.

BY JOHN COLAPINTO

At 8 A.M. on July 8th, the day after he was sworn in as the junior senator from Minnesota, Al Franken arrived at the Hart Senate Office Building, in Washington, D.C., for an informal breakfast with constituents and new staff members. Some fifty or so people crammed into a small chamber within the complex of offices that used to be occupied by Norm Coleman, Franken's predecessor. A central table was loaded with coffee urns, pitchers of juice, and a chafing dish filled with wild-rice porridge. Franken, a short, sturdily built man, made the rounds of the room. His hair—which he used to wear in a huge fuzzy nimbus in his "Saturday Night Live" days ("You mean my Jewfro?" he said to me)—has long since been tamed into a short-back-and-sides cut. He wore tortoiseshell horn-rims and a gray summer-weight suit. When he smiled—a huge, toothy smile—his eyes disappeared into slits. Because he is short, he was often hard to see in the crowd, but he was never hard to find, owing to a raucous laugh that cut cleanly, and often, through the hubbub.

More than eight months had passed since the general election, on November 4th, when the race between Franken, a Democrat, and Coleman, a Republican, ended up too close to call. Finally, on June 30th, after a record-setting marathon of recounts and legal proceedings, Franken was declared the winner. This gave Coleman the distinction of having twice lost elections to candidates with unusual résumés: in 1998, he lost a run for governor against the wrestler Jesse (the Body) Ventura. Now he has lost to a man who starred in the movie "Stuart Saves His Family," as a simpering self-help guru who mewled the daily affirmation "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and, doggone it, people like me!"

The mood at the breakfast was lively. Franni, Franken's wife of thirty-three years, a thin, animated woman with wire-rimmed glasses, stood near the porridge table. "It's so wonderful," she said. "As soon as he was sworn in, I just felt as light as air. Just so joyous and relieved. It's 'Finally, Franken can get started!'" Franken's chief of staff, Drew Littman, a Capitol Hill veteran who had been the policy director for Senator Barbara Boxer, of California, was talking about how Franken loves events like this breakfast. "We have to drag him out of these things," Littman said. "Also, he's introduced himself to every security guy and maintenance worker. We did a walk-through of the swearing-in on Monday before the Senate opened. He stopped everyone who was pushing a cart, pushing a broom—shakes hands and introduces himself. Most senators just avert their eyes and walk as quickly as they can."

Franken's daughter, Thomasin, a dark-haired twenty-eight-year-old with her father's deep dimples, had retreated next door, into Franken's new Senate office, a large room that was, as yet, undecorated except for a small snapshot of Franken's family, which sat on a bureau behind the desk, along with a framed photograph of his close friend Paul Wellstone, the liberal Democratic senator who held this seat from 1991 until his death, in 2002. Thomasin sat on the edge of the desk. She was talking with Jess McIntosh, Franken's press secretary, about the reaction of reporters when Franken was introduced to the public, two days earlier, by the Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid. Everyone, from the *Times* to Politico, had expressed disappointment that Franken had failed to be funny and, instead, had acted solemnly senatorial, vowing to work as hard as he could for Minnesotans.

"Like he would ever, under any circumstances, come out to be introduced by the Majority Leader and crack jokes!" McIntosh said.

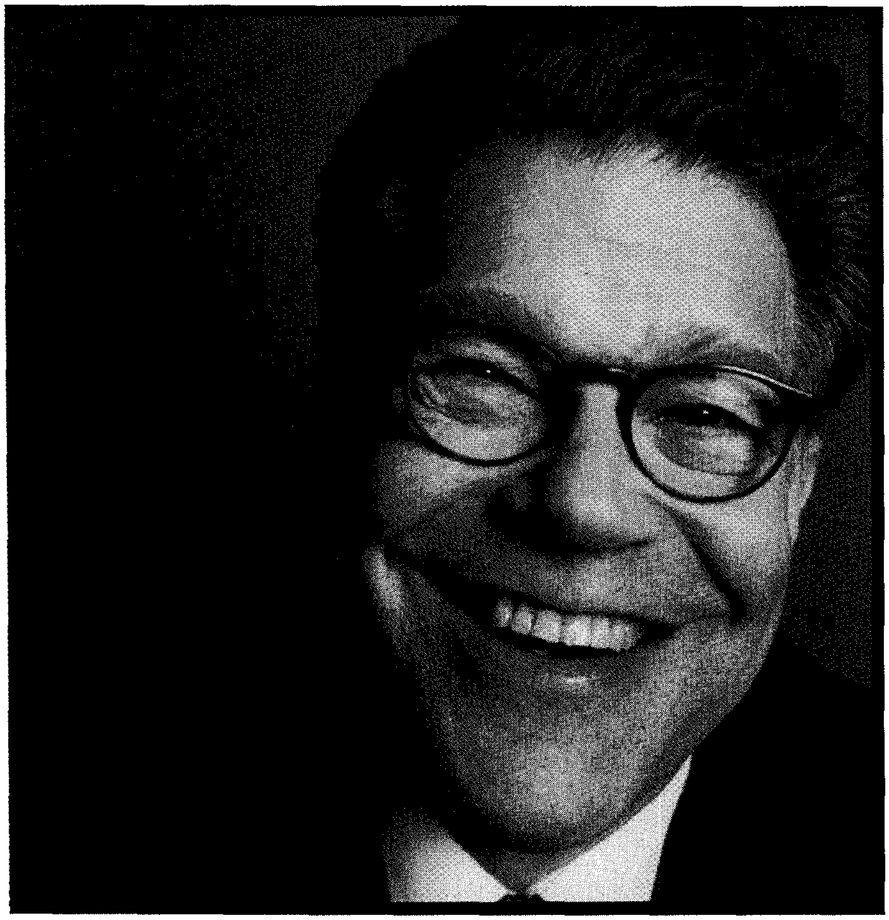
"Yeah," Thomasin said. "They criticize: 'He's a comedian, and it's going to be very inappropriate if he's funny.' And then it's 'Oh, he wasn't funny!'"

Like Hillary Clinton in 2001, Franken enters the Senate as someone both blessed and burdened with the kind of celebrity that can summon a press scrum at a moment's notice but can also create resentment among colleagues; also like Clinton, he has been reviled by Republicans. The day the Minnesota Supreme Court declared him the winner, Senator Jim Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma, called him "the clown from Minnesota." Senator John Cornyn, Republican of Texas, had previously declared that any effort to seat Franken prematurely would result in "World War III," and he had suggested that a federal challenge could keep Coleman fighting in the courts for "years." Such rancor, however, seemed to have vanished, at least for the moment. At his swearing-in, Franken was welcomed by repeated rounds of applause from his fellow-senators—including Republicans—who had shown up in force for the ceremony. Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah, gave him a bear hug on the Senate floor, and, later, in the hallway outside, Franken received a similar embrace from none other than Inhofe. He was still glowing from the reception.

"Yesterday was a magnificent day," Franken said at the breakfast. He went on, in a telltale deadpan, "And my feeling is that, um, if we can just make every day—" The room exploded in laughter.

"I did my first vote yesterday," he said. "It was a little odd, because I discovered something about the Senate. Which is that you don't get as much notice as I would normally want to have to evaluate the value of a program that I'm voting on the funding of." (Franken had voted nay on an amendment, sponsored by John McCain, that would have eliminated funding for an anti-terrorism bus-safety program in Minneapolis—"an easy call," as McIntosh put it, from a constituents' perspective. Still, Franken was startled that he had had less than half an hour to study the bill; McIntosh, new to the Senate herself, acknowledged that a bill that was not an easy call would have been "scary.")

"But I'll learn the ropes here," Franken continued. "I need all your help to do that. And those of you whose job it *isn't* to help me do that—who are just visiting?" He cracked a wide grin. "Don't *worry* about it!"



The interminable suspense became "the new normal." Photograph by Steve Pyke.

CONTOUR BY GETTY

Franken was born in New York in 1951, the younger of two boys. (His brother, Owen, is a photojournalist.) When Franken was four, his father, Joe, moved the family to a small town in southern Minnesota to run a quilting factory owned by his father-in-law. The business failed, and two years later the family moved to the Minneapolis suburb of St. Louis Park. Joe became a printing salesman; Franken's mother, Phoebe, got a real-estate license and began selling houses.

About twenty per cent of St. Louis Park's residents were Jewish. They had moved there from the inner city, attracted by cheap housing and a lack of redlining restrictions, which kept Jews out of other suburbs. "Not exactly a *shtetl*," Franken has written, "but by Minnesota standards, a *lot* of Jews." The *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, the political scientist Norm Ornstein, and the moviemakers Joel and Ethan Coen all grew up in St. Louis Park, within a four-block radius of one another. Some years ago, the ex-neighbors were asked by former Vice-President Walter Mondale why St. Louis Park produced so many notable people. Franken suggested runoff from a nearby creosote plant. The Coen brothers grandly equated the place with a small area of Hungary that had produced several nuclear physicists. Friedman suggested a solar-lunar eclipse. Miriam Kagol, who taught journalism at St. Louis Park Senior High School (Friedman was one of her students), offered another opinion, in a piece about the suburb in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, where she spoke about the migration of Jews to St. Louis Park in the forties and fifties: "It was at the time that all the political ferment had reached the Midwest and people were just full of ideas and protests, opinions, speaking their minds, finding ways to be free and anti-establishment."

The Franken family talked about politics at the dinner table. Phoebe Franken was a Democrat. Joe had always voted Republican, but in 1964 he switched parties, "disgusted," Franken has written, "with Goldwater's opposition to the 1964 Civil Rights Act," and voted Democratic in every election until his death, in 1993. But his primary influence on his son was not political. He loved comedy and comedians, and, with his sons, watched comedy shows for hours on television. It took Franken a while to make the connection with his own career. "I didn't get it," he told me. "And then suddenly one day I said, Oh, I know why I went into comedy!" Franken insists that comedy and politics are not as far apart as they might seem. Politics, he says, is about helping other people, making their lives better. Comedy does the same thing. "I actually think that making people laugh makes their lives better," he told me. "You can't underestimate that."

In 1968, at the Blake School, a private high school, Franken met Tom Davis, and they formed a comedy-writing partnership. They remained a team for twenty years. "I'm not at all surprised that he has become a politician," Davis told me. "I think what attracted him to comedy was that he wanted to do political satire. We started right in with Nixon stuff." He went on, "He's always had this amazing work ethic, an infinite amount of energy and intelligence and concentration, and now he's finally bitten into something that's really substantial."

In 1969, Franken went to Harvard, where he majored in behavioral sciences. There he met Franni, a student at neighboring Simmons College. Their relationship was founded in part on a shared passion for politics. She was from Maine. Her father, a Second World War veteran, died in a car accident when she was seventeen months old, and her mother brought up Franni and her four siblings on Social Security survivor-benefit checks, supplemented by a job at a grocery store. Four of her children attended college on Pell grants and other scholarships. The experience made Franni a lifelong Democrat and a passionate defender of social programs for the poor. During the Senate campaign, Franken often told audiences, "Conservatives like to say that people need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps—and that's a great idea. But first you've got to have the boots. And the government gave my wife's family the boots." (The two married in 1976, and have a second child, Joe, who works in finance.)

After graduating, Franken spent two years in Los Angeles, doing mostly politically oriented standup with Davis. In 1975, Lorne Michaels hired the pair to join the writing staff of "Saturday Night Live," which was about to début. They got off to a slow start. Then, with the writer Jim Downey, they worked on a parody Presidential debate between Gerald Ford (Chevy Chase) and Jimmy Carter (Dan Aykroyd). "We worked with Chevy and Danny very closely on those debates," Davis said. "So we stood out, and they discovered that Franken and Davis had this political-satire thing for real." During that first season, Franken briefly joined his brother, Owen, who, working as a photographer, was covering the New Hampshire primary. They attended an event featuring President Gerald Ford. Franken asked Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, to appear as a guest host on "Saturday Night Live." Nessen performed in an Oval Office sketch in which Ford, played by Chase, stumbled over a wastebasket, stapled his ear, and shouted "Roll over, Liberty!" to a stuffed dog. (Nessen later received a reprimand from Ford's son Jack.) In another first-season sketch, written by Franken and Davis, Aykroyd, as a despairing Richard Nixon, weeps as he talks with Henry Kissinger, played by John Belushi, on the eve of announcing his resignation:

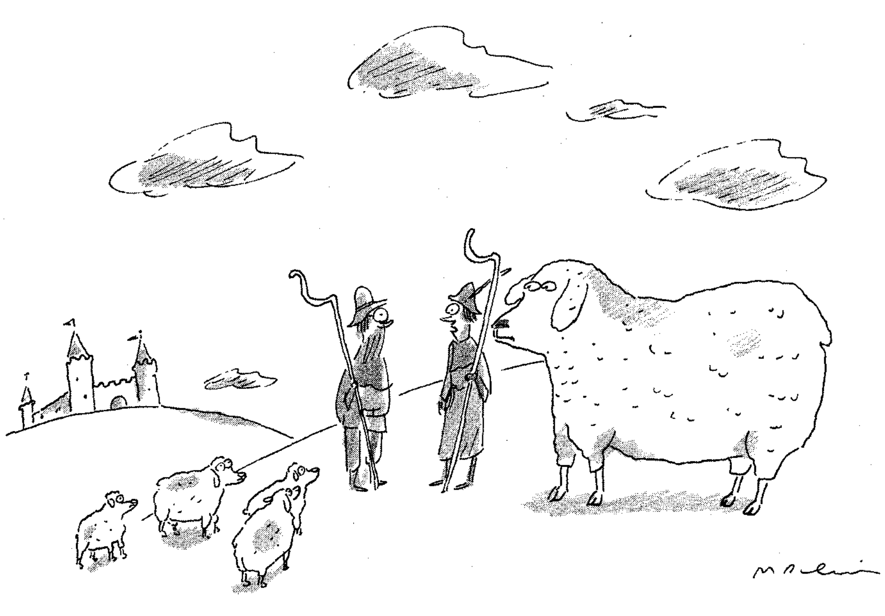
NIXON: I'm telling you, Henry: I had nothing to do with the bugging of Watergate! I had nothing to do with the cover-up! With the break-in to Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office! Or with the man who was killed in Florida!

KISSINGER: Vhat man was killed in Florida, Mr. President?

NIXON: You don't know about the little Cuban who . . . ah . . . never mind. Henry, get down on your knees and pray with me.

KISSINGER: Mr. President, you've got a big day tomorrow, why don't ve get in our pajamas und go sleepy?

NIXON: Don't you want to pray, you Christ-killer?



"I prefer shepherding one big sheep rather than a lot of little ones."

Franken wrote for "Saturday Night Live" from 1975 to 1980, and from 1985 to 1995. During his second stint, he was a more frequent onscreen performer, both as Stuart Smalley, the self-help guru, and as himself, in a recurring bit in which he announced the eighties as the "Al Franken decade." ("Vote for me, Al Franken. You'll be glad you did!") But he left the show when Michaels refused to let him anchor "Weekend Update." He concentrated on writing movies. Among them was the Andy Garcia and Meg Ryan drama "When a Man Loves a Woman," about a husband helping his wife overcome alcoholism, which was in part autobiographical. Early in their marriage, Franni had successfully battled alcoholism—during his Senate campaign, Franken spoke publicly about this—and he later helped organize an intervention for Davis, who was abusing various drugs. (Franken has himself acknowledged cocaine use in his "S.N.L." days.) The insights that Franken gleaned about twelve-step programs also informed his creation of Stuart Smalley.

In 1988, Franken attended the Democratic Convention, in Atlanta, where he approached his old St. Louis Park neighbor Norm Ornstein. They had not known each other in Minnesota, but Franken had watched Ornstein's appearances as a commentator on C-SPAN and on the "McNeil-Lehrer News Hour," on PBS. The two became friends. "I knew from the beginning that this was not the typical show-business person who in stereotype thinks he or she knows everything but in fact knows very little," Ornstein told me. "This is a guy who has been a policy wonk for his adult life, not only interested in what's going on but really keeping up with it—and he's smart as hell."

When Franken was asked to anchor Comedy Central's coverage of the 1992 general election, he invited the owlish Ornstein to act as his pollster and straight man. After Bill Clinton's victory in that election, Franken and Ornstein frequently joined the Clintons and other politicians and pundits at the annual Renaissance Weekends, on Hilton Head Island. Franken once declared himself an unabashed fan of President Clinton, calling him, "without a doubt, our best postwar President, and, if not for Roosevelt, the greatest of this century," and adding, "Do I feel this way because I played touch football with him? Maybe." Franken wrote comedic material for the President and the First Lady to deliver at Gridiron dinners and other functions. "I was his point person for the White House," Mandy Grunwald, a former adviser to Clinton, says. "I was the person who would say, 'Al, you can't say that—he's the leader of the free world!'"

Then came the midterm revolution of 1994, in which the Republicans captured fifty-four seats in the House and eight in the Senate—a victory produced in part by the belligerent rhetoric of Newt Gingrich, who became Speaker of the House, and by Rush Limbaugh, who roused millions of listeners. "Nobody was talking back to those guys," Davis says. "That was a turning point," Franni Franken says. "That's when Al started writing his books."

"I just got more and more sort of *upset*," Franken says. His first book, "Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot" (1996), included "S.N.L."-like parodies of the major Republican players. (A chapter titled "Operation Chickenhawk" imagined the warmongering Vietnam avoiders Limbaugh, Dan Quayle, Pat Buchanan, George Will, and Clarence Thomas being led, terrified, into battle by Oliver North.) But the book also gave free rein to Franken's policy aspirations. To rebut Limbaugh's assertions that under Ronald Reagan the poor received greater tax relief than the rich, he quoted from the Congressional Budget Office's 1992 Green Book. He also wrote knowledgeably about the debates on health care, legal reform, and the environment.

The book went to No. 4 on the *Times* best-seller list. Franken followed it, three years later, with another politically themed book; this one was less successful commercially but hinted at his subsequent transformation from pundit to politician. Titled "Why Not Me?," it was a meticulously researched fictional history of a successful Franken campaign for the Presidency in 2000 (and his eventual impeachment and removal from office). While sketching out the narrative, Franken held brainstorming sessions with Ornstein, Grunwald, and the *Newsweek* columnist and editor Howard Fineman. "We had a lot of discussions along the way just about the nature of electoral politics," Ornstein says. "How do you run? What do you do? What are the rules?"

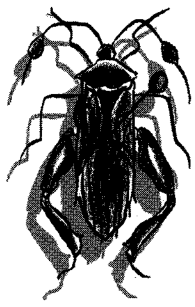
If Franken had designs on a real political career, however, he kept them secret for a few more years. "Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right" (2003) provoked even greater animus among Republicans. It mocked the Bush Administration's pre-9/11 anti-terrorism strategies ("Operation Ignore"), conservative commentators ("Ann Coulter: Nutcase"), and Bill O'Reilly's boasts of a working-class background. At BookExpo America that year, in Los Angeles, Franken was on a panel with O'Reilly, who repeatedly yelled at him to "shut up." (Their set-to was broadcast live on C-SPAN.) O'Reilly's bosses at Fox News sued Franken and his publisher for using its "Fair and Balanced" slogan in his book's subtitle; the suit was dropped after Fox failed to win an injunction against the book, but the publicity helped drive it to No. 1 on the *Times* best-seller list.

In 2004, to counter right-wing talk-radio celebrities, Franken began hosting his own program on Air America. "It was a political thing," Franken told me. "That was the point of that, to not cede the radio. Not cede the dialogue." In early 2006, he moved the show from Manhattan to Minneapolis—the first outward sign that he was contemplating a run for the Senate. He placed less emphasis on comedy and spent more time on substantive policy issues. But it was not, he says, until December, 2006, while on a U.S.O. tour in Iraq, that he "pulled the trigger" on the decision to run for the Senate. "I'd been thinking about it," he says. "I was thinking, God, do I want to put my family through this? Do I want to take a couple of years off from working and earning an income? Do I want to work eighteen hours a day on this? And I'm in Iraq, and I just look around me and I go, 'Are you kidding? Here are men and women on their third or fourth tour of duty. It's horrible on *their* families, they're in *danger*, for goodness sake. I mean, how can I not do this?' "

In February, 2007, he announced that he would challenge Senator Norm Coleman.

Like Franken, Coleman is originally from New York. He celebrated his twentieth birthday at Woodstock (a college-yearbook picture shows him with center-parted hair falling well below his shoulders), and he entered politics as a Democrat. He moved to Minneapolis in 1976, after earning a law degree, and worked as a prosecutor in the Minnesota Attorney General's office. In 1993, he was elected mayor of St. Paul, and served two terms. He also supported the 1996 Senate reëlection campaign of Paul Wellstone. But shortly after Wellstone's victory Coleman became a Republican, and in 2002 Karl Rove and George W. Bush urged him to make a bid for Wellstone's seat. Wellstone was slightly ahead of Coleman in the polls when, eleven days before the election, Wellstone, his wife, their daughter, and five others died in a plane crash. Former Vice-President Mondale ran in Wellstone's place but lost narrowly to Coleman. Franken, who had campaigned for Wellstone in all three of his Senate races, was devastated. Grunwald, who also worked on Wellstone campaigns, says that bitterness over that election was still being felt during this year's recount battle. "In a way," she says, "this all started when Paul died."

Franken raised more than twenty million dollars for his campaign against Coleman, exceeding every other Senate challenger in the country. Coleman was equally well funded. The campaign quickly got ugly. Coleman portrayed Franken as an unserious, and even unstable, candidate. Franken promoted a plan for renewable energy, proposed a retirement plan that could be carried from job to job, called for fully funding the Veterans Administration, urged a five-thousand-dollar tax credit for students, and advocated trade agreements that included labor and safety standards. But he also played rough. Speaking of Democrats, he once wrote, "Our attack dogs are a scrawny, underfed pack of mutts that spend half the time chasing their own tails and sniffing each other's butt." Now he ran a series of ads that accused Coleman of taking trips paid for by special interests, accepting money from big oil and drug companies, and "living almost rent free in a million-dollar home of a Washington insider." (Coleman sued over that one, but the suit was dismissed.) Three days before the election, the Minnesota *Star Tribune* reported that a lawsuit filed in Texas against Nasser Kazeminy, a businessman and Coleman supporter, contained allegations that Kazeminy had funnelled seventy-five thousand dollars to Coleman's wife through her employer, a Minneapolis insurance broker. (Coleman and Kazeminy denied the charges.) "It was intense," Grunwald says. "Right up until the last second."



Election Day returns showed Coleman and Franken virtually tied. "I remember I went to sleep knowing it was just extremely close, and not knowing in the morning when I woke up whether I'd be ahead or behind and by how much," Franken told me. "After a couple of hours of sleep, I heard we were behind by seven hundred votes or something." He was crushed. "What happens is that the campaign becomes about, kind of, you know, the hopes and dreams of people riding on you," he said. "Not just the people supporting you but the people you meet along the way."

Several days later, when the tally was complete, Coleman's lead had shrunk to two hundred and six votes—less than a hundredth of a per cent. By Minnesota law, a margin of less than one-half of one per cent requires a recount. Anticipating a close race, Franken's campaign manager, Stephanie Schriock, had had lawyers on standby in case of a recount, and had begun recruiting and training volunteers to help oversee the sorting and counting of ballots across the state. "I knew going into Election Day we would be ready for whatever happened," Schriock said. "And, thank God, we were."

The recount began on November 19th. Minnesotans vote by filling in a bubble beside the candidate's name on a paper ballot, which is then run through an optical scanning machine. In a recount, Minnesota law requires that every ballot be counted by hand. At more than a hundred recount stations in the state's eighty-seven counties, representatives from both campaigns observed the sorting and counting of almost three million ballots. Secretary of State Mark Ritchie put up a Web site that kept a running tally of the count, which took seventeen days. The newspapers and television news faithfully kept track of the horse race, but these published totals were not an accurate reflection of the count, since each campaign's representative could challenge ballots where there was doubt about the voter's intent—ambiguous scribbles, areas where the voter seemed to have signed or initialled the ballot (which disqualifies the vote under Minnesota law), and other irregularities. These challenged ballots were placed in a separate pile, and left uncounted until they could be examined by the State Canvassing Board. The Coleman campaign ran up hundreds of challenges in every precinct, temporarily—and artificially—lowering Franken's totals. But at every recount table Schriock had installed a volunteer to write down the original call by the neutral election judge—"on the assumption that most of the challenges would not stand," she says. That way, the Franken organization was able to keep track of what the actual recount totals might look like. "This was critical," Schriock says. "The most important thing for us was to make sure you got the right information all the time, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week."

When the first phase of the recount ended, on December 5th, the official totals gave Coleman a lead of almost two hundred votes. However, the Franken campaign's internal count suggested that Franken was ahead by somewhere between thirty-five and fifty votes.

The State Canvassing Board, made up of Ritchie and four judges chosen from across the political spectrum, met to consider the challenged ballots on Tuesday, December 16th. By this time, Franken was feeling hopeful about his prospects for victory. "There is a subset of Democrats who tend to mis-fill out ballots," he told me. "The way you mark the ballot is like an S.A.T.—you fill in the circle. And the subset of people who tend to, like, put a check there instead, or an X, or fill it out wrong, tend to be people who didn't take S.A.T.s, or first-time voters, or people with English as a second language. So it seemed like we had a very good chance of prevailing."

Each challenged ballot was projected onto a large screen visible to a roomful of observers from the public and the press. The members of the Canvassing Board scrutinized and debated the markings on each ballot to decide the voter's intent, and their deliberations were videotaped and streamed live over the Internet. Minnesotans found the process mesmerizing.

Some ballots presented little difficulty; in one instance, a voter had clearly filled in the bubble beside Coleman's name but had accidentally, or in a moment of indecision, touched his pencil tip in Franken's bubble, leaving a small dot. The judges gave the vote to Coleman. Other ballots provoked long, absurdist exchanges. One ballot—from Beltrami County—became locally famous. The voter had filled in the bubble for Franken but had printed "Lizard People" in the write-in area. After a few minutes of discussion, Marc Elias, a lawyer for Franken, spoke up. "My argument would be that 'Lizard People' is not a genuine write-in," Elias said. "In other words, is not a person."

"Do we know that for sure?" one of the judges asked.

Another asked, "If it said 'Moon Unit Zappa,' would you say, 'Oh, no, there is no such person as Moon Unit Zappa?'"

"I would say that that would be permissible," Elias said.

"Well, but you don't know that there's *not* someone named Lizard People. You don't!"

The judges voted to have the ballot tossed out.

On December 30th, the Canvassing Board finished adjudicating the challenged ballots, and added the tallies to the earlier vote totals. Franken pulled ahead by forty-nine votes.

The election now hung on a set of absentee ballots that had not been counted on Election Night. Some three hundred thousand absentee ballots had been cast in the general election, considerably more than in previous elections. Of these, twelve thousand had been rejected without being opened by election officials, because they failed to meet one or more of the state's strict criteria: that they be notarized or witnessed by a registered voter, for instance, or that the signatures and addresses on the outer envelope match the voter's absentee-ballot application. The Coleman campaign had initially fought hard to keep all rejected absentee ballots out of the count. Ordinarily, absentee ballots are cast by older voters who cannot get to the polls and by overseas military personnel. Both groups tend to vote Republican. But the Franken people, noting that the Obama campaign's national drive for early voting had spurred record numbers of Democrats to the polls before November 4th, suspected that many Democrats had used absentee voting as a way to cast their ballot ahead of Election Day.

The Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that the rejected ballots be reviewed, and ordered the candidates and election officials to coöperate in identifying ballots that were improperly rejected. This allowed for some gamesmanship. The envelopes bore return addresses, which led the campaign representatives to try to guess what was inside. "The Coleman people were extra hard on St. Louis County, which is Duluth," Schriock says. Duluth tends to vote heavily Democratic. "And we were probably extra hard on really red Republican counties." Ultimately, both campaigns came up with nine hundred and thirty-three envelopes that they could agree had been rejected improperly.

"The real money is in not getting caught."

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On January 3rd, a Saturday, the ballots were opened in a room in the basement of the state legislature building. Secretary of State Ritchie, with representatives of both campaigns standing over him and a video camera live-streaming the event, opened the envelopes one at a time. As he opened ballot after ballot and called out "Franken," Schriock says, "I realized it was going to be O.K. In fact, it was going to be really good."

When the count was over, Franken's lead had grown from forty-nine votes to two hundred and twenty-five. On Monday, the Canvassing Board certified the results. Having kept out of the public eye since the election, Franken called a press conference that afternoon. Standing at a lectern on the snowy street outside his house, Franni beside him, he struck a conciliatory tone toward Coleman, and thanked his campaign staff. "Now I am in the business of serving the people of Minnesota," he said. "For our state, today marked the end of a long process that will forever be a part of Minnesota history."

Minnesota election law, however, grants the loser in a recount a chance to challenge the tally, in a so-called Election Contest: a court trial, with testimony and evidence, before a specially selected three-person panel of Minnesota Supreme Court justices—an expensive and time-consuming procedure. "I actually thought there was a good chance that he would not contest it," Franken told me. "Because we had so transparent, so complete, so meticulous a recount."

The Election Contest of Coleman v. Franken began on January 26th, in the Minnesota Judicial Center, in St. Paul. Coleman needed to get more votes. The only place to find them was in the still unopened absentee-ballot envelopes that had been rejected on Election Night, in accordance with Minnesota law. To get some of those opened, the Coleman team needed to persuade the judges to relax the state's legal standards. They settled on a risky strategy to do that: invoking the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the 2000 recount in Florida, in Bush v. Gore—a ruling so unusual that even the Justices responsible for it suggested at the time that it be limited to "present circumstances" and not taken as precedent.

In 2000, Bush's lawyers put a stop to the recount in Florida by arguing that the "equal protection" clause of the Constitution, which guarantees that all citizens have the right to have their vote counted equally, was being violated, because Florida lacked a uniform standard in determining what constituted a legal vote. The Supreme Court agreed. The recount was stopped, Election Day totals stood, and Bush was handed the Presidency.

Coleman's lawyers had discovered that on Election Night, in some Democrat-heavy urban precincts, election officials had opened and counted a number of absentee ballots that did not strictly conform to the rules—ballots whose envelopes had been signed in the wrong place, for example. Coleman's lawyers were now demanding that similar rejected absentee ballots from other counties be opened and counted. His campaign claimed to have discovered some forty-four hundred such rejected absentee ballots—ballots that, Franken's lawyers, and the local press, noted, were drawn largely from rural precincts that tended to vote heavily for Coleman. The judges ultimately permitted the counting of three hundred and fifty-one rejected ballots, which increased Franken's lead by eighty-seven votes.

Coleman's team put more than twenty election officials on the stand, hoping to convince the justices that there had been significant differences in how absentee ballots were handled across the state, and that these differences violated voters' equal-protection rights. In turn, Franken's lawyer Kevin Hamilton argued that any discrepancies among the counties were the result of the routine errors that occur in every election—and did not rise to the level of an equal-protection violation. "No election is perfect; imperfections, precinct-level math errors, and paperwork confusion occur in every election and they occur in every county in the state and every state in this nation," Hamilton said. "Our democracy doesn't demand machinelike, antiseptic perfection."

On April 13th, the contest panel unanimously rejected Coleman's equal-protection argument and declared Franken the winner. Coleman announced that he would appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

During the seven weeks between the end of the Election Contest and the Supreme Court hearing, Franken tended to avoid the press, but on May 31st, the day before the oral arguments, he invited me to visit him and Franni at their condominium apartment, in a semi-detached brick town house with castle-like corner turrets, a ten-minute walk from downtown Minneapolis.

Franken was clearly using all his actor's experience to seem measured and senatorial, but his frustration was palpable. Perched on the edge of a settee, his elbows on his knees, he said, of the Senate, "I definitely would love to be there now—I would love to have been there for a while." Of the endless suspense, he said, "It's been so long that, in our lives, it's sort of become the new normal." He let out a loud but mirthless cackle.

Franni, who had curled up in a nearby armchair, said, "Yeah, for us the campaign never ended!"

Franken said that in early January he had decided to conduct himself as if his eventual seating were simply a matter of time, and had been duly meeting in Washington with people who could teach him about Senate procedure, and travelling around Minnesota, talking to constituents. He had been reading the newspaper very thoroughly. Mostly, though, he had been fund-raising, in order to pay his lawyers. So far, the recount battle had cost his campaign more than ten million dollars.

At nine o'clock the next morning, the justices filed in and took their seats. Many believed that the jurist most likely to be sympathetic to Coleman's equal-protection argument was Justice Christopher Dietzen, who had been appointed in 2008 by the Republican governor, Tim Pawlenty, and who previously had given thousands of dollars to G.O.P. candidates, including Coleman. But it was Dietzen who opened up the most persistent line of questioning, zeroing in on the Coleman team's "offer of proof"—a stack of hundreds of photocopied absentee-ballot envelopes. The photocopies purported to show that lax standards for rejection had been used in the cities, strict standards in the rural and suburban precincts—and that the discrepancy was so widespread as to require the remedy of now opening thousands of illegal ballots. But the Coleman team had included ballots from less than half of the state's eighty-seven counties, had provided no voter testimony to explain the circumstances under which they were cast, and no specific testimony from election officials as to why they were accepted or rejected. (In some instances, an absentee ballot might not have been counted because the voter was able to make it to the polls.) Dietzen did not appear impressed, saying, "In my experience, I've never *seen* an offer of proof like this."

On June 30th, the court ruled unanimously for Franken. Two hours later, Coleman conceded. He also called Franken, who later told reporters, "I thought, This is nice. This is a nice way to end this."

It was getting past 9:30 A.M. and Franken's staff-and-constituents breakfast was winding down. But Franken was lingering. A female staff member who will be based in Franken's Minnesota office told him that her husband was on the phone and just wanted to say a quick hello. Franken took her proffered cell phone.

"Hey, Rick," Franken said. "I was thinking of you." He listened for a moment. "O.K., I wasn't. I just tell everyone that. They feel good for a second and then I tell them I wasn't. Then they laugh." He let out his own noisy laugh. They talked for a couple of minutes, then he said, "O.K., I'll give you back to your wife. And, really, I was thinking about you."

McIntosh appeared and pointed across the room. "You have new guests," she said.

They were a family from Wisconsin, a middle-aged woman, her husband, and their two teen-age kids. Franken invited them to try the wild-rice porridge. "We have bowls," he said. "We have spoons. Just try it." The woman agreed to take a bowl.

"So where in Wisconsin are you from?" Franken asked her.

"Green Bay."

"I've heard of it," Franken said, and the woman laughed.

She said that she loved his work on "Saturday Night Live," and asked where she could see more of it.

"YouTube," Franken said. He seemed ready to continue talking for as long as the woman liked, but Littman, who had been pacing nearby, suddenly appeared at his elbow. "I've got to pull you into your office," he said, "and start going over the votes. O.K.?"

"O.K.," Franken said.

He excused himself, and the two men disappeared into Franken's office and closed the door. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

THE TEMPERATURE OF HELL: A COLLOQUIUM

BY IAN FRAZIER

According to the best scientific data currently available, both the average and the mean temperatures of Hell have risen 3.8 degrees since 1955. Although an increase of this size may seem insignificant, especially to those not spending eternity there, the reality of the situation is quite different when experienced in concrete terms. For example, occupants of Hell who in 1955 were standing night and day in boiling pitch up to their knees report that, owing to the expansion of pitch at higher temperatures, they now must endure the torment all the way up to mid-thigh, or even higher, during Hell's warmer seasons. Condemned souls who have to lie on their backs chained to a flat rock while a white-hot sheet of iron is lowered to within inches of their faces have stated that the rise in Hell's ambient temperature now makes the iron seem much closer to their faces than it actually is.

Former Vice-President Al Gore, who was among the first to raise concerns about this problem, convened an interdisciplinary gathering in December of 2008 to discuss some of Hell's climate issues and how we might begin to address them. To encourage the widest possible range of views, Mr. Gore invited a mixture of climate experts, satanic functionaries, representatives of industry, people from the faith community, average citizens, advocates for the aged, and a large number of the souls of the damned who are dealing with these changes on a daily basis. Owing to travel restrictions on some of the participants, the convocation took place deep in a smoldering, sulfurous Hell-mouth below a subbasement in the Sony Building. The following is an edited transcript:

Mr. Gore: Thank you all for coming today—is that rotten-egg smell bothering anybody? We're working on getting some fans to ventilate that out of here—and I'd like to start right in with a question for those of you who have temporarily ascended from the innermost bowels of Hades. You know what it's like down there, while many of us still don't. First off, I think we'd all like to know: how hot is it?

ZOHAR LAZAR

Mr. Magus: Thank you, Mr. Gore, for convening this distinguished assembly, and I'm honored you invited me. My name is Simon Magus and I am, or was, a Samaritan sorcerer of the first century consigned to everlasting perdition for the sin of simony, the selling of church offices or preferments (a sin, for what it's worth, named after me). I've been in Hell for going on two millennia now, and, to be honest with you, I haven't noticed that much of a difference. I'm told it's hotter lately, and I guess I'll take your word for it. But where I am, down in the Third Chasm, it's incredible. I mean, flames fall on our bare feet constantly, the rock our bodies are stuck in is practically on fire—it's Hell, basically, so it's very, very hot already. I just worry that we might be making a big deal out of nothing here.

Ms. Bieluska: Can I respond to that?

Mr. Gore: Please, go ahead.

Ms. Bieluska: Mr. Gore, I am the shade of Amber Catherine Bieluska, of Lakewood, Ohio, and I would like to disagree strongly with the statement that has just been made. I am in Hell for a lot of minor things, the biggest one being that I never paid the sixties band that played at my third wedding, and I'm supposed to be enduring only mild agony in First Circle Plus, which is as high in Hell as you can go, and my own personal suffering and atonement have got so much worse just in the past few years. Where I'm at, it's always been more stuffy than really *hot* hot, but recently it's become so damp and humid, and, with the incoming spirit traffic and all the particle pollution from that, I feel my own punishment, which was totally unfair to begin with, has been made much more horrible through no fault of my own.

Mr. Gore: Thank you, Ms. Bieluska and Mr. Magus, and we'll be coming back to you shortly, but now I'd like to turn to one of the country's leading authorities on terrestrial and infernal climates, Dr. James Hansen, of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Dr. Hansen, tell us, are we "making a big deal out of nothing"?

Dr. Hansen: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and I extend greetings to all you folks, former folks, and Satan-serving fiends who have taken the time to attend this vitally important event. I wish I could say we *were* making too much of Hell's growing problems, but I'm afraid the news in that area is very grim indeed. As you may know, more human beings now occupy our planet than have occupied it at any other time in all of history or prehistory—some six and a half billion souls, and counting—and when these people die, as they're all going to do, we can anticipate that all but .0001 per cent of them will not be going to Heaven. Granted, a lot of these will stop at Purgatory, but the rest will descend directly to Hell. We expect that the sudden influx of souls will put a huge strain on Hell's carrying capacity and make large regions of it virtually uninhabitable.

Now, we are accustomed to thinking of the basic affliction of Hell as the burning brimstone—and, yes, brimstone *is* a significant part of the package, with its horrible odor and disgusting yellow color and the way it sticks to the skin and so on. But brimstone is essentially just sulfur, a rather expensive commodity when compared with, say, coal. And the fact is that owing to cost considerations low-grade soft coal—so-called "dirty coal"—is currently providing more than ninety-three per cent of the energy for the fires of Hell. At the rate of growth we're seeing now, consumption of that amount of coal for all eternity is simply unsustainable. As you know, I have recently been involved in an international committee looking into Hell's long-term energy picture, and we have recommended that Hell convert as soon as possible from a coal-based soul-scourging system to one that relies on clean-burning, plentiful, and inexpensive natural gas. Now, I am aware that this idea has not been popular among the dark powers and principalities, but—

(*Here the tape of the proceedings is interrupted by blasts of deafening static from the electromagnetic emanations of the demons, tempters, subtempters, satyrs, and gargoyles who begin to burst through interstices in the Hell-mouth's crusted floor, flying redly past the speaker's dais and among the participants looking on from folding chairs. An unholy discord and din, with howling and gnashing of teeth untranscribable. Now a molten whirlpool appears and advances gurgling until it reaches Mr. Gore and sucks him from view.*)

"Hello? Hello? . . . Is this thing on? . . . Hello, this is Al Gore, and I'm fine, my pant cuffs are singed and the bottoms of my shoes are smoking a little, but I want to emphasize that I am O.K. I am going to continue to talk into this lavalier microphone clipped to my shirt collar in the hope that those of you up top can still hear me. What has happened is that I seem to have slid down a chute type of deal into the vestibule of Hell itself. It's uncomfortably warm here, no question about that, and there are big red neon signs saying 'You Are in Hell—Get Used to It!,' and now I see a robed spirit figure walking toward me and—hey, wait a minute! Is that . . . is that *Mickey Mantle*?"

"Welcome to Hell, Mr. Vice-President, and, yes, you are correct, I am the spiritual remnant of what used to be Mickey Mantle—baseball legend and executive. I have been consigned to this place not for anything I did on the diamond but for some of my off-the-field antics, as detailed in such books as 'Ball Four,' by Jim Bouton, and Billy Martin's 'Number 1.' If those books had not been written, my sins probably would have escaped notice—but, hey, I'm not complaining. So far I've been enjoying my assignment as Hell's official greeter, and I'd love to take you on a look around. May I?"

"Lead away, Mick!"

"All right, Mr. Vice-President—watch your head as we go down this hot-lava staircase here, and over on your *zzzt* left you can see the *zzzt* where teachers who were *zzzt* mean to *zzzt* in elementary sch*zzzt* must suffer *zzzt zzzt zzzzzzzzzzzt* . . ."

(*At this point, Mr. Gore descended beyond the coverage area and began to break up. The colloquium adjourned for a ninety-minute lunch, after which the transcript resumes.*)

SATAN HIMSELF: Could everybody please take their seats? Surrender your souls to me and worship and obey me? Thank you. I'm told that Sony will need this space back by 5 P.M., and there's still a lot left on the agenda, so we have to move along. Some of you might not recognize me without the big cape and the collar that goes all the way up to my horns, and my tail is tucked into my right pant leg, but I'm Beelzebub, Mephistopheles, Abaddon, Baal, Old Nick, Mr. Blackburn, Randi Weingarten, or whatever name I'm being given these days. Mr. Gore has thoughtfully suggested that while he's finishing his tour I rise from my foul throne at the absolute lowest depths of perfidy and corruption to address you about the troubling situation we're facing in Hell today.

Right now in Hell we are hurting. That's the single most important takeaway I would like you to get from what I have to say to you this afternoon: we are hurting. Hell is being pressed to and beyond its limits to such an extent that we are having trouble simply performing our jobs. Every day, I must make hard choices from among an inadequate supply of options. People in the land of the living are constantly requesting that this or that other person "rot in Hell," and we've always tried to accommodate that, and as a result we have literally tens of billions of individuals—tier after tier after *tier* of them—sitting there rotting, and we have had to put in new tiers and still they are all over the place. And is anybody besides us giving any thought to maintenance? To the necessary monitoring of the rot? To staffing? I'm a detail-oriented type, I'm actually *in* the details, and recently that's been where I'm falling down, and it's hurting my most important attribute, which is my pride. I like my helper devils to have the best titanium pitchforks, and that's been impossible for us under current conditions, so they've been having to just sort of poke the wretched sinners with their long and pointy fingernails. That's only one example.

Because of ongoing constraints, I am sorry to say, the operation of Hell is no longer even close to what it should be, and important areas of quality are being degraded. I hate with my most ancient and implacable hatred of all that is good to have to say this, but unfortunately it's true. So, for me, the whole increase-in-temperature thing, while important, is pretty far down on my list of concerns. I can stand at the exact center of the sun, temperature twenty-eight million degrees Fahrenheit, and it's like a summer breeze to me. Far as I'm concerned, warming is not the problem; it's the over-all decline in Hell's capabilities. Right now, with the resources we're being given, we are not punishing souls for their specific transgressions anymore, we're just warehousing them. And that's a shame.

So when you look at your kids asleep in their beds after you return to your homes this evening, I want you to ask yourselves, "What kind of Hell am I leaving for them, and for my grandchildren?" Once we've all thought about that, maybe we can set aside personal concerns and begin to act in the larger interest of Hell. But now I am being informed that my time is up. Do you know who you're talking to? Do you have any *idea* who you are talking to? May I do my demonic laugh before I go? ♦

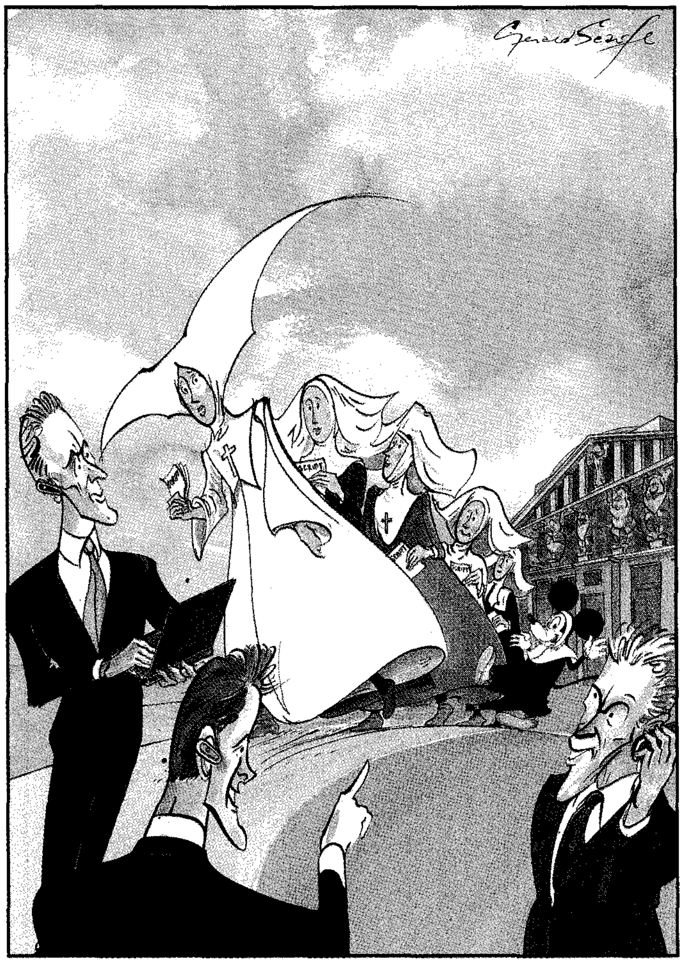
LIFE AND LETTERS

FUN WITH NUNS

Selling Hollywood on an updated convent comedy.

BY PAUL RUDNICK

I was lying on my couch one afternoon in the late nineteen-eighties, trying to come up with an idea for a screenplay, and I began thinking about drag. Why is a guy in a gown, I wondered, funnier than a woman in a three-piece suit? I tried to imagine a disguise or transformation that might be more fun for a female star, and my thoughts turned to nuns. Nuns can be dictatorial, sexually repressed, and scary—and, therefore, entertaining. I pictured a lower-rung showgirl who witnesses a gangland hit. To protect her, the Feds hide her in a convent, and, because it's a comedy, she's forced to wear a habit. I was inspired by such gender-swapping classics as "Some Like It Hot," and by Barbara Stanwyck as a burlesque queen invading a houseful of clueless college professors in "Ball of Fire." But I wanted nuns, so I called my notion "Sister Act."



Could the nuns go to a drive-in movie? Could they get high?

GERALD SCARFE

I brought "Sister Act" to the producer Scott Rudin, and we agreed that the leading role was a natural fit for Bette Midler, the dependably rowdy star of "Ruthless People" and "Outrageous Fortune." Midler's production company was based at Disney, so Scott set up a meeting in New York with a studio chieftain. I pitched "Sister Act," and a deal was struck. I was stunned at how quickly the project came together, but then the Lord works in mysterious ways. He may even work for Disney.

I wrote a treatment, which is a studio term for "Summarize the story in less than two pages so that an executive's assistant can boil it down to one paragraph on a Post-it, and please refer to all characters by the names of the stars who should play them but never will." The treatment, like any activity in the studio sector, is designed to make the project appear surefire. It's an iron-clad guarantee, assuring every staff member that his or her job, home, second home, spouse, and vehicle upgrades are in the bag.

This process was still new to me, so my treatment was a bit offbeat. I wanted "Sister Act" to be a satire of sugary family perennials like "The Sound of Music," "The Singing Nun," "The Flying Nun," and such parochial-school romps as "The Trouble with Angels" and its sequel, "Where Angels Go . . . Trouble Follows." These mainstream nun movies were full of sage, older nuns who, after offering their wisdom, would die serenely off camera; with younger guitar-strumming "rebel" nuns, sometimes riding Vespas; and with feisty novices, who either had to be broken, via missionary work, or farmed out to the von Trapp compound. My favorite nun saga is "The Song of Bernadette," a bio-pic about a French peasant girl who experiences visions of the Virgin, as portrayed by an immaculately brunet Linda Darnell. A healing spring bursts forth at the site of Bernadette's epiphany, and it ultimately becomes the millions-served holy shrine of Lourdes.

My plan was for "Sister Act" to subvert this sort of prissy uplift. I wanted our heroine, Terri Van Cartier, to embody raunch, sex, and the unstoppable gospel of cheap showbiz. It would be pop versus Pope; and pop, in a barrage of sequins, wisecracks, and Marlboro Lights, would win. That's how addled or innocent I was, because I actually believed that Disney would make a movie that tried to subvert the Catholic Church.

Treatment in hand, I was flown to Los Angeles for a meeting blitz. The Disney headquarters, like everything else Disney, was enchanting and disturbing. There was a topiary clipped into an eerily threatening boxwood Mickey, and street signs bearing the names Goofy Avenue and Dopey Drive. Carved above the entrance to an office tower was a monumental nineteen-foot-high concrete relief of the seven dwarves with their arms raised, as if they were hoisting the upper floors. This effect was both adorable and grotesque: if the figures are that tall, they're not dwarves anymore, plus they're corporate slaves. During this period, Disney's hands-on management style justified the studio's nickname, Mousechwitz.

The first meeting took place in the sleek office of an ebullient vice-president. All the Disney executives at that time wore unconstructed black or navy suits by Armani or Comme des Garçons, for a Rodeo Drive ninja feeling. The studio was about to release what would become its blockbuster animated musical "The Little Mermaid," and the V.P. was holding what looked like a bright-colored cardboard purse.

"Paul, look!" he exclaimed, tilting the purse this way and that. "It's the Little Mermaid Happy Meal!" I noticed a framed photo of a softball team on the ledge behind him. "That's from our company picnic," he explained. "It was so much fun!" I asked about the other grinning, sunburned people in the picture, all wearing "Team Disney" sweatshirts and Mousketeer ears. After looking at the picture and thinking for a minute, the V.P. said that most of them had been fired.

Another, equally gung-ho executive appeared, carrying, in his palm, a three-inch-high plastic figurine of the Little Mermaid herself, with her chunky cascade of red hair and her skimpy seashell bra.

"Look at her!" the exec said. "Isn't she hot? I'd do her!" Other staffers convened for the meeting, and they all agreed that the figurine was indeed hot and doable. As in all decent studio meetings, everyone was "totally stoked" about "Sister Act" and eager to "fast-track" the property. Most of the executives' notes were about shaping the material for Bette Midler and about how much they all loved nuns.

"Nuns!" I declared. "I'd do 'em!" Everyone cheered.

I returned to New York and completed a first draft. I handed it in, and there were questions. With Midler considering the role, the movie could now become an all-out musical, so what should she sing? Original material or Motown standards? Since Terri, the showgirl, chafes at convent life, could she smuggle some of the nuns, with a few stashed in the trunk, out to a drive-in movie? To a whorehouse? To McDonald's, for product placement? Could the nuns get high? What about sex? I felt that enforced chastity would be a logical source of comedy: wouldn't Terri get itchy? What if there was a male character who felt turned on yet was terrified by his hankering for a nun?

"Wilma Kooney strangled on cat hair."

I flew out for more meetings. Midler and her staff were present this time, and she was becoming uneasy. She fretted about her image: did she dare play a nun? As she put it, "My fans don't want to see me in a wimple."

Months passed, and I produced draft after draft. One morning, I found myself seated before a borrowed typewriter in a tower suite at the Chateau Marmont, in Los Angeles. The room had open windows on two sides, looking out on the valley, the hills, and a Diet Coke billboard. As I worked, a breeze came up, and the stacks of pages flew around my head. I couldn't decide whether I felt like one of those beleaguered, soon-to-be-hard-drinking screenwriters depicted in any number of black-and-white movies, or a sparkling Disney princess being visited by a mob of helpful, twittering bluebirds.

About a year in, Team Disney, Team Midler, Scott Rudin, and I sat in a meeting discussing Catholic teachings on vows of silence, poverty, and chastity, and the specifics of the Franciscan versus the Benedictine order. Glancing around, I realized that I was analyzing papal dogma with a roomful of Jews. Finally, someone suggested that, for some hands-on research, I should be sent to a convent.

"Yes!" cried Midler, a firm believer in continuing education. "Paul, you really need to go to a convent!"

So I was shipped, by bus, to the Abbey of Regina Laudis, in rural Bethlehem, Connecticut. I'd read that this convent was the home of the actress Dolores Hart, who, as an ingénue, had appeared as a spring-break coed in "Where the Boys Are" and had played opposite Elvis Presley in "King Creole." Hart had left Hollywood to become a nun, taking her final vows in 1970. She told an interviewer, "There is a promise given in a vocation that is beyond anything in your wildest dreams. There's a gift the Lord offers and He is a gentleman." She also said, "Elvis is a young man with an enormous capacity of love . . . but I don't think he has found his happiness. I think he is terribly lonely."

I couldn't wait to meet this ponytailed starlet turned sister. I arrived at the convent, a series of rambling clapboard buildings set amid woods and pastures, and was assigned a bed in a gender-appropriate bunkhouse. Regina Laudis was a cloistered order, so it wasn't the ecclesiastical petting zoo that I'd hoped for. The nuns weren't readily available for conversation. Since they received no funding from the Vatican, they supported themselves by running a farm, a dairy, and a pottery studio; they were too busy to talk to anyone except their husband, Jesus.

Alone in my bunk, I went over my research. Convents in America, I found, had something in common with charm schools: enrollment was way down. In the years before feminism, a young woman was expected to get married, and her employment options were limited, so becoming a nun could actually be a route to independence. But lately, if you ask your average teenager to abandon boys, fluffy duvets, and downloads of her favorite bands, it's a tough sell. Convents and monasteries were closing everywhere, their land sold off and the buildings bulldozed. The few remaining abbeys often echoed with teetering seventy-year-old nuns tending to ailing ninety-eight-year-old nuns. Vatican II had caused additional attrition. Once nuns were permitted to wear street clothes and to work in the community, many potential novices decided, why not just become a teacher or a social worker with a livelier Saturday night? I worried that "Sister Act" might be the final crude iron nail in the Sisterhood's simple pine coffin.

I decided to stalk Dolores Hart. I had been hoping that there was a papal dispensation that allowed her to pray in capris, with a pert, high-lighted flip. I skulked around and wandered into a cottage that turned out to be the convent's gift shop. The stock was skimpy, mostly ceramics, organic skin creams, and greeting cards. (They now also sell a "Women in Chant" CD titled "Virgin Martyrs.") At first, I didn't notice a tiny, gnarled creature perched on a stool behind the cash register, like a bat or a long-fossilized chimp.

"I hate this!" the chimp yipped, and I saw that she was trying to watch a soap opera on a black-and-white portable mini-TV, the perfect accessory for a nun. "The G-D reception keeps going out!" she cried. "I can't see my show!"

I hoped this wasn't what remained of Dolores Hart, so I instantly turned myself into an accomplished investigative journalist.

"Good afternoon, Sister," I began.

"What?" she croaked.

"I said, Good afternoon. I'm visiting. So, is this the gift shop?"

"What does it look like?"

I detected an unspoken "asshole" at the end of her remark, and I was taken aback.

"It's so lovely out here," I ventured.

"We're not 'out here.' We're inside. And it's cold. What's wrong with this thing?" She pounded the set with her knuckles, as if she were boxing its ears.

"So, how long have you been a nun?" As I asked this, it felt as if I were hitting on her, and that we both should be holding long-necked beer bottles and scanning the room for someone hotter.

"Since before you were born, boy," she answered. "What would you know about it?"

Maybe her harsh personality had got her exiled to the gift shop, to heal herself through selling bookmarks and rosaries. I decided to reach out.

"Is it a hard life?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's a hard life. I'm a nun. It's supposed to be a hard life. What are you?"

"I'm a writer," I said.

"What?"

"I'm a *writer.*"

She laughed, because, of course, every nun's a critic. "That's good," she said, still sniggering. "A writer! I like that."

"So, why did you become a nun?"

"Why? I was sixteen. I had eight brothers and sisters. I liked to pray, I believed in God, I had a calling. End of story."

I was running out of probing topics. "So, do you ever wish that you'd chosen a different life?" I asked.

She stared at me in disgust. "Only when my G-D TV doesn't work!" A final swat caused a grainy image to reappear, and she turned away, absorbed in a studly young doctor's flirtation with a heavily mascaraed nurse.

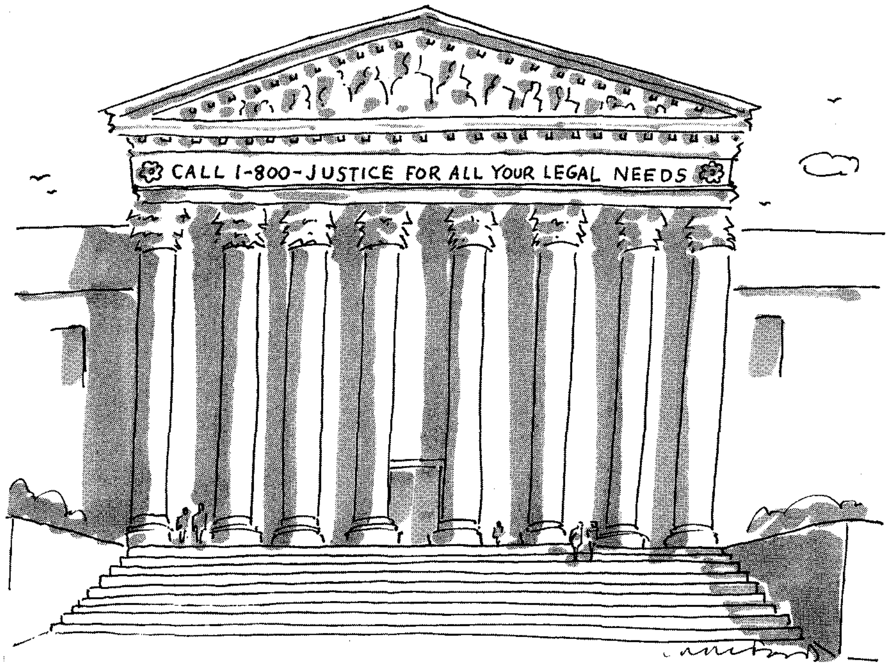
At six-fifteen the next morning, I attended a prayer service, held in a rough wooden chapel that reminded me of a finished basement or a cedary humidor. As the nuns bowed their heads, I did what I do at any religious service: I looked at the floor and mumbled gibberish, except for the word "amen." I'm a lapsed suburban New Jersey Jew; for my bar mitzvah, I learned the Hebrew portion phonetically, from a recording. Catholicism always seemed more exotic, the way your friends' parents can seem more interesting than your own; your friends' parents also have no power over you.

The service was heartfelt, unadorned, and a little boring. (The nuns, I learned, pray constantly when alone and attend eight services a day.) The room was dim and freezing, lacking any vivid stained glass or theatrical velvet. This is why I'm not a nun, I thought.

That afternoon, I was allowed a brief audience with a sister who was, if not the Mother Superior, someone highly placed in the nun command. Speaking through a shadowy grille in a central parlor, she was kind and helpful, although she didn't waste time.

"Welcome to Regina Laudis," she said. "What are you doing here?"

I paused, and then I told the nun that I was researching a novel about a woman seeking a more prayerful life within convent walls. I suspected that replying "I'm writing a Disney farce about a tramp in a habit" wasn't the correct response. I asked the sister about the convent's history, and she supplied basic, informative answers. She was accustomed to ignorant outsiders.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At first, I decided that deliberately lying to a nun would finally guarantee my passage to Hell. I thought again, and realized that I was being entirely self-absorbed. The nun probably couldn't care less. She didn't want any of the things I wanted. She wouldn't pray for an unlimited supply of chocolate-covered pretzels or brawnier shoulders or the ability to fly. She and I worshipped entirely different Madonnas. I wanted to tempt her with a Snickers bar or a copy of *Us* magazine, just to see if she'd crack.

After two days at the convent, as I prepared to board the bus for home, I caught sight of an older woman carrying a pail of milk from a convent barn. She was wearing mud-spattered rubber boots and a down vest over her habit. She was smiling, and she looked as if she could be Dolores Hart. I decided not to approach her, since she was working hard and probably didn't need to be asked any more questions about Elvis. She'd done something unheard of for an American: she'd been offered the life of a celebrity and, quietly and politely, she'd said no.

On my ride back to New York, I read a book called "Lesbian Nuns: Breaking the Silence." I learned that for gay women, especially those in earlier generations, the cloister had often been a true sanctuary, although the higher-ups would separate lesbian couples, citing a ban on "particular friendships," which struck me as just plain mean.

At my next meeting with the Disney people in Los Angeles, I shared all my discoveries, and the information about the lesbian nuns was deemed especially not useful. After still more drafts, my contract expired and wasn't renewed. Midler had finally abandoned the role, and "Sister Act" was dead, but then, as with Bernadette on that bleak French crag—a miracle!

Whoopi Goldberg was suddenly eager to play the part of Terri, although she asked that the character's name be changed to Deloris, because, I was told, she'd always wanted to play someone named Deloris. Disney asked me to return to the project, and, despite the prospect of more meetings and more notes and, most likely, a discussion of whether to include a sparkly Day-Glo strawberry-scented Communion wafer in the "Sister Act" Happy Meal, I said yes.

I flew out and was introduced to the director whom the studio had just hired for the movie, Emile Ardolino, a sweet-natured, silver-haired man, who had developed a superb camera technique for capturing ballet for the PBS series "Dance in America," and who had worked with Scott Rudin on his Oscar-winning documentary about Jacques d'Amboise, "He Makes Me Feel Like Dancin'." Hollywood had found all of this suspiciously highbrow, so Emile had fought his way to directing the hit Catskills romance "Dirty Dancing." It was time to begin casting the supporting nuns in "Sister Act," and I was included in the process.

The script called for actresses of all shapes and ages, although the Disney executives still squabbled over which nuns should be "fuckable." Deloris would be supervising the convent choir, so the women auditioning were asked to prepare a song. The film's musical director was Marc Shaiman, who had worked with Midler for years and was admired for his many film scores; later, he wrote the score for "Hairspray." To audition for the many singing-nun roles, Marc brought in dozens of veteran Broadway, cabaret, and recording artists. Marc, Scott, Emile, and I were all intravenous users of original-cast CDs, so in that room Ethel Merman was Spider-Man.

The auditions resembled nothing so much as a Gay Jeopardy Tournament of Champions. Susan Johnson would enter, and we'd all rush to compliment her on her work in "The Most Happy Fella," a show that opened before most of our panelists were born. We saw Mary Wickes, who had performed opposite Bing Crosby in "White Christmas." Then an actress appeared, and Emile, his eyes shining, gushed, "I loved you in 'Donnybrook!'" I bowed to Emile, because I'd never even heard of "Donnybrook!"

My rewrites were less rewarding. The studio notes poured down: "Deloris needs to be more sympathetic." "Deloris needs to teach the nuns, but she needs to learn something, too." "The movie isn't about nuns, it's about friends." "Could Deloris help a needy child?" "Does Deloris need a dog?" "Can we have a montage where Deloris and the nuns bond while painting a colorful anti-drug mural?" The Disney notes were always phrased in the most positive, gee-wouldn't-it-be-great-if tone, and that was the problem. It was like being trampled to death by cheerleaders.

The studio deadlocked over casting Whoopi's love interest. All the insinuated sexual content of the early drafts was long gone, but there was still a by-the-book police officer who supervised Deloris's transfer to the convent, while developing the most tame, Disneyfied crush. The question was, should the officer be Caucasian or African-American? The studio was in a dither of political correctness mixed with business concerns. Was interracial love a brave step forward, or would black audiences object? What about the white Southern demographic? How could the studio keep every moviegoer happy? Finally, a honcho burst into a meeting, burbling with excitement. "I've got it! I've got the guy!" he said. "I know exactly who Whoopi's boyfriend should be—Edward James Olmos!"

I stared at him. Finally, I said, "Excuse me, but do you think that if a black person and a white person have a baby it's a Hispanic?"

"Yes!" he shouted triumphantly, and to this day I'm not sure if he was kidding. Either way, I couldn't take the process and the notes and the prospect of all of those nuns hugging, so I quit.

After I left, "Sister Act" was rewritten by half of Southern California. Even as shooting began, writers came and went, and working on the film became a form of jury duty. I'd get occasional updates, from friends and gossip columns, as the star, the studio, and the script erupted. Whoopi, one newspaper reported, had shipped one of the executives a hatchet to bury, and he had sent her a boxed set of heavy brass balls.

Because I was still a beginner, I desperately wanted to avoid Whining Screenwriter Syndrome. I'd signed a contract and cashed the checks, which were underwriting my work on a new play. It hadn't occurred to me that, at some point, "Sister Act" would actually be released.

One day, late in 1991, I was FedExed a final draft of the script. Good or bad, it was no longer my work, so I asked to have my name removed from the credits. The studio was unhappy with that, and I got a series of urgent calls offering me a videocassette of the final cut and asking me to watch it and reconsider. I refused, because, even if the movie was terrific, it wasn't my script. An executive suggested, "Paul, don't watch the movie alone. Get a bunch of your friends and have them all come over and make popcorn and watch it together. You'll have a blast!" I answered, "You know, I could invite my friends over and bring out a dead puppy. And we could toss it around the room, but we really couldn't say it was flying."

After that exchange, Disney agreed that I could use a pseudonym, pending its approval. I first suggested R. Chasuble, after Reverend Chasuble, the priest in Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest." The Disney executive was skeptical. I came up with "Screenplay by Goofy." He wasn't amused. So I joined the first name of a character from a story I'd written to my brother's middle name and arrived at the blandly inoffensive "Joseph Howard." This was rubber-stamped by the studio, even though it sounds like the name of someone who helped found the Mormon Church.

"Sister Act" opened in May, 1992, and was, improbably, a great success. It hadn't been an expensive production, so everyone made money, including me. I had nothing to do with the sequel, "Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit," but there's a credit line that reads "Based on characters created by Joseph Howard." A stage version is currently running in London. In interviews, Bette Midler has expressed regret at not appearing in the film. A year after it opened, I ran into one of the original executives on the project, and he said, "Paul, you know, you should really write something for Bette."

"I did," I told him.

"What?"

" 'Sister Act.' "

"Oh, that's right!" he replied, laughing.

I can't vouch for the original film, for one reason. "Sister Act" may very well be just fine, but I've never been able to watch it.

As for Dolores Hart, I read recently that she is now the Prioress of Regina Laudis. Also, throughout her decades in the convent, she has kept up her membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She apparently loves being sent DVDs of all the latest movies. As far as I know, she's the only nun who's allowed to vote for the Oscars. ♦

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PROFILES

SHERIFF JOE

Joe Arpaio is tough on prisoners and undocumented immigrants. What about crime?

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

Joe Arpaio, the sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, looked disappointed. Al Sharpton was supposed to come to Arizona to lead a march demanding Arpaio's resignation. But Sharpton had other plans. "He's going to Alabama this weekend instead," Arpaio told Lisa Allen, his media-relations director. They were riding in the back of the Sheriff's car, a big black Chrysler with tinted windows. "He'll never come," the Sheriff said bleakly. "Alabama—isn't that where Bull Connor was, that they're always comparing me of?" Two silent, extra-large deputies rode in the front seat. Arpaio, who is seventy-seven, thick-bodied, and restless, studied the strip malls and waste grounds streaming past. He wore a gray suit, no badge, a tie clip in the shape of a pistol. "But Shaq is coming tonight?" he asked. Allen thought he was. The occasion was the première of the film "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," at a mall in Tempe, where Arpaio looked forward to walking the red carpet with Shaquille O'Neal.

Arpaio is known as "America's Toughest Sheriff." He even wrote (or caused to have written) a book with that title, as well as a second one, published last year, "Joe's Law: America's Toughest Sheriff Takes On Illegal Immigration, Drugs, and Everything Else That Threatens America." When he's not taking on everything that threatens America, Arpaio pursues his passion for being in the vicinity of celebrities. He made a point of visiting Charles Barkley when Barkley was in his jail on a D.U.I. earlier this year. After it was reported that the Los Angeles County jail was having trouble with overcrowding, he offered to put Paris Hilton into his lockup after her D.U.I. (No luck.)

Tempe had been awarded the "Wolverine" première in an online vote. A modest outdoor stage had been thrown together, under a billboard for Hastings & Hastings, discount accident lawyers, and the mall parking lot was mobbed. "Where's the red carpet?" Arpaio asked. It turned out to be a long, dirty, maroon rug. The crowd, craning to catch a glimpse of Hugh Jackman, seemed to be mainly teen-agers. A sunburned middle-aged couple approached Arpaio and asked for a photograph with him. He obliged—this was more like it.

The first celebrity arrived, a big guy in heavy stage makeup, with well-muscled arms and long blond hair and extremely white teeth. He bared his teeth and flexed his biceps, mugging for the cameras. I asked a gangly teen-ager in a tuxedo who he was. Clearly astounded by my ignorance, the teen-ager said, "That's Sabretooth, from 'American Gladiator'!" The actor, Hollywood Yates, later told me that his character on "American Gladiator" was, in fact, Wolf.

People who were actually in "Wolverine"—Jackman, Liev Schreiber, Will.i.am—started arriving, each bounding onto the little stage to raucous applause.

Shaquille O'Neal never showed.

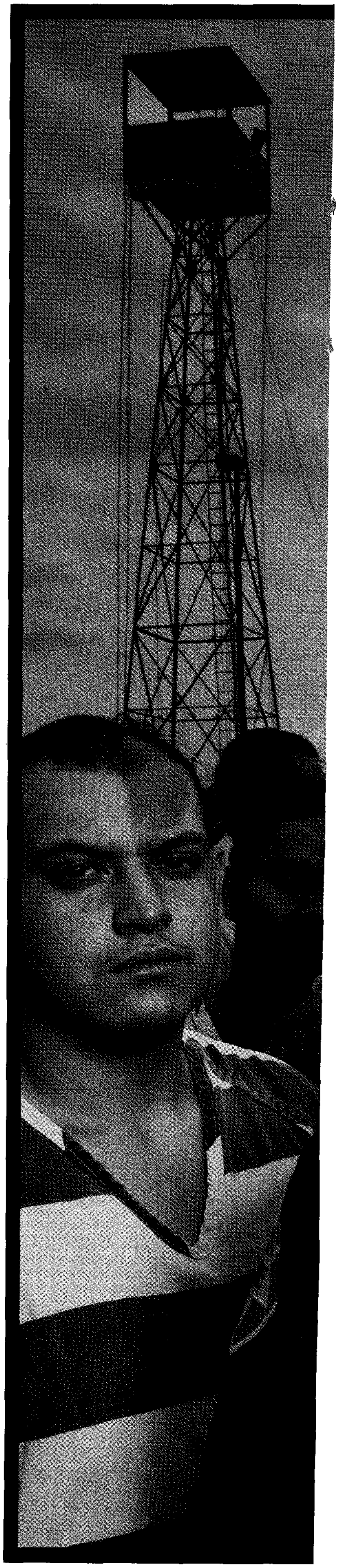
I asked Hollywood Yates what he thought of Arpaio.

"He's awesome!"

Yates's wife, Shari, who had joined us, grimaced. She was slim, blond, in her late thirties. She wore much less makeup than her husband. "Joe is too hard-core for me," she said.

"Well, I love it," Yates said. "Those people are in jail for a reason."

Maricopa County is not a modest, out-of-the-way place. It includes Phoenix, covers more than nine thousand square miles, and has a population of nearly four million. Joe Arpaio has been sheriff there since 1993. He has four thousand employees, three thousand volunteer posse members, and an overworked media-relations unit of five. Like



Arpaio and inmates at the Tent City jail. Photograph by Dan Winters.

most sheriffs in America, he is elected. He is currently enjoying his fifth four-year term, and looking forward to winning a sixth in 2012. Maricopa sheriff's races are, in the age of Arpaio, not lighthearted affairs. Stephen Lemons, a political reporter for the weekly Phoenix *New Times*, told me with some chagrin that Barack Obama's victory in November was actually overshadowed, in his mind, by Arpaio's reëlection.

Arpaio always wanted to be a cop. His parents were immigrants from Naples. "They came through Ellis Island *legally*," he says. His mother died giving birth to him in Springfield, Massachusetts. His father owned grocery stores there, and Joe was raised mostly by friends and relatives. After a hitch in the Army, he became a patrolman in Washington, D.C.—"Black neighborhood," he told me. He later worked as a federal narcotics agent in Turkey and Mexico and, finally, Arizona, where he retired. He and his wife, Ava, who have two children, ran a small travel agency in a suburb north of Phoenix. Then, in the early nineties, Joe decided to run for sheriff against an incumbent weakened by scandal. In Maricopa County, where the population has more than quadrupled since 1970, it is not always a disadvantage to lack local roots. Arpaio wasn't eloquent, but he spoke in short, quotable bursts, and he pummelled opponents with gusto. He promised to crack down on crime and to serve only one term. He won the Republican primary, which is traditionally all one needs in Maricopa.

The biggest part of the sheriff's job is running the jails, and Arpaio saw that there was political gold to be spun there. The voters had declined to finance new jail construction, and so, in 1993, Arpaio, vowing that no troublemakers would be released on his watch because of overcrowding, procured a consignment of Army-surplus tents and had them set up, surrounded by barbed wire, in an industrial area in southwest Phoenix. "I put them up next to the dump, the dog pound, the waste-disposal plant," he told me. Phoenix is an open-air blast furnace for much of the year. Temperatures inside the tents hit a hundred and thirty-five degrees. Still, the tents were a hit with the public, or at least with the conservative majority that voted. Arpaio put up more tents, until Tent City jail held twenty-five hundred inmates, and he stuck a neon "VACANCY" sign on a tall guard tower. It was visible for miles.

"I can't afford to lose my phone. I've assigned it talismanic properties."

His popularity grew. What could he do next? Arpaio ordered small, heavily publicized deprivations. He banned cigarettes from his jails. Skin magazines. Movies. Coffee. Hot lunches. Salt and pepper—Arpaio estimated that he saved taxpayers thirty thousand dollars a year by removing salt and pepper. Meals were cut to two a day, and Arpaio got the cost down, he says, to thirty cents per meal. "It costs more to feed the dogs than it does the inmates," he told me. Jail, Arpaio likes to say, is not a spa—it's punishment. He wants inmates whose keenest wish is never to get locked up again. He limits their television, he told me, to the Weather Channel, C-SPAN, and, just to aggravate their hunger, the Food Network. For a while, he showed them Newt Gingrich speeches. "They hated him," he said cheerfully. Why the Weather Channel, a British reporter once asked. "So these morons will know how hot it's going to be while they are working on my chain gangs."

Arpaio wasn't kidding about chain gangs. Foreign television reporters couldn't get enough footage of his inmates shuffling through the desert. New ideas for the humiliation of people in custody—whom the Sheriff calls, with persuasive disgust, "criminals," although most are actually awaiting trial, not convicted of any crime—kept occurring to him. He put his inmates in black-and-white striped uniforms. The shock value of these retro prisoner outfits was powerful and complex. There was comedy, nostalgia, dehumanization, even a whiff of something annihilationist. He created female chain gangs, "the first in the history of the world," and, eventually, juvenile chain gangs. The chain gangs' tasks include burying the indigent at the county cemetery, but mainly they serve as spectacles in Arpaio's theatre of cruelty. "I put them out there on the main streets," he told me. "So everybody sees them out there cleaning up trash, and parents say to their kids, 'Look, that's where you're going if you're not good.' " The law-and-order public loved it, and the Sheriff's fame spread. Rush Limbaugh praised him, and blurbed his book. Phil Donahue berated him.

Arpaio's one-term campaign promise had to be shelved. Opinion polls found that Sheriff Joe, as he was called, was the most popular politician in Arizona. The Democrats didn't even bother running a candidate against him in

1996. In fact, he often says, the governorship has long been his for the taking. But he likes being sheriff—he pronounces it "shurf." He got a tank from the Army, had the howitzer muzzle painted with flames, and "Sheriff Arpaio's War on Drugs" emblazoned on the sides, and rode in it, with Ava, in the Fiesta Bowl Parade. He decreed that all of his inmates—there are now roughly ten thousand of them, double the number when he took office—must wear pink underwear. And pink socks and pink flip-flops. Even pink handcuffs. Pink, he explains, mock-sincerely, is a soothing color.

"I know just how far I can go," Arpaio told me. "That's the thing."

His deputies, particularly his jail guards, seem to have less sense of how far they can go. Thousands of lawsuits and legal claims alleging abuse have been filed against Arpaio's department by inmates—or, in the case of deaths in detention, by their families. A federal investigation found that deputies had used stun guns on prisoners already strapped into a "restraint chair." The family of one man who died after being forced into the restraint chair was awarded more than six million dollars as the result of a suit filed in federal court. The family of another man killed in the restraint chair got $8.25 million in a pre-trial settlement. (This deal was reached after the discovery of a surveillance video that showed fourteen guards beating, shocking, and suffocating the prisoner, and after the sheriff's office was accused of discarding evidence, including the crushed larynx of the deceased.) To date, lawsuits brought against Arpaio's office have cost Maricopa County taxpayers forty-three million dollars, according to some estimates. But the Sheriff has never acknowledged any wrongdoing in his jails, never apologized to victims or their families. In fact, many of the officers involved have been promoted.

Other jails get sued, of course. The Phoenix *New Times* found that, between 2004 and 2008, the county jails of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston, which together house more than six times as many inmates as Maricopa, were sued a total of forty-three times. During the same period, Arpaio's department was sued over jail conditions almost twenty-two hundred times in federal district court. Last year, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care withdrew the health accreditation of Maricopa County's jails for failing to meet its standards, and a federal judge refused to lift a long-standing consent decree on the jails, finding that conditions remained unconstitutional for pre-trial detainees. (The consent decree mandates that the jails be monitored. But it hasn't had much effect.)

Remarkably, Arpaio has paid almost no political price for running jails that are so patently dangerous and inadvertently expensive. Indeed, until recently there were few local or state politicians willing to criticize him publicly. Those who have, including members of the county board of supervisors, which controls his budget, tend to find themselves under investigation by the sheriff's office. Local journalists who perturb Arpaio have also been targeted. The Phoenix *New Times* ran an investigation of Arpaio's real-estate dealings that included Arpaio's home address, which he argued was possibly a violation of state law. When the paper revealed that it had received an impossibly broad subpoena, demanding, among other things, the Internet records of all visitors to its Web site in the previous two and a half years, sheriff's deputies staged late-night raids on the homes of Michael Lacey and James Larkin, executives of Village Voice Media, which owns the *New Times*. The deputies arrested both men for, they said, violating grand-jury secrecy. (The county attorney declined to prosecute, and it turned out that the subpoenas were issued unlawfully.)

Outspoken citizens also take their chances. Last December, remarks critical of Arpaio were offered during the public-comment period at a board of supervisors meeting, and four members of the audience were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct—for clapping. Their cases are pending.

Some local politicians have begun to speak up. Phil Gordon, the mayor of Phoenix, publicly denounced Arpaio last year for abuses of power. Gordon told me in his office recently that the Sheriff has imposed "a reign of terror" on Maricopa County. But the Mayor was referring neither to the jails nor to the intimidation of critics. He was mainly talking about a wide-ranging campaign, carried out by Arpaio in recent years, against undocumented immigrants in Maricopa County.

Arizona is a major corridor for Latin Americans sneaking into the United States, and the Phoenix area is both a stopover and a destination. Roughly half a million undocumented immigrants live in the state. Arizona is also full of retirees from the Midwest and the Northeast—Sun City is in Maricopa County—and these elderly Americans are, by and large, not completely delighted to find themselves among folk, mostly poor and brown, who don't speak English. The state is home to an array of nativist groups, and its legislature has passed perhaps the harshest anti-immigrant laws in the country. Arpaio, always a discerning student of conservative voter sentiment, surveyed all this a few years back and decided to transform his sheriff's department, with a crucial assist from the Bush Administration's Department of Homeland Security, into a sort of freelance immigration-enforcement agency.

His deputies conduct extensive raids in Latino towns and neighborhoods. They say they have investigated and arrested more than thirty thousand undocumented aliens. This campaign has landed Arpaio on Lou Dobbs's show, on CNN, where he is treated as a conquering hero, and has drawn support from ultra-right and racist groups, including neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. It has also brought Arpaio critical attention from civil-rights organizations.

In March, the U.S. Department of Justice, at the request of members of Congress, launched an investigation into charges of discriminatory conduct by the sheriff's office in Maricopa County. "It's garbage," Arpaio says—grandstanding by politically correct bureaucrats afraid to enforce the laws, Obama Democrats throwing their weight around. Certainly, it has not slowed the pace of his roundups. "Since I got my letter March 12th, we've locked up another hundred fifty," he told me in April. In the world according to Sheriff Joe, almost every problem in America these days can somehow be traced back to "illegals."

That was presumably why Arpaio seemed so excited to hear the early news about swine flu: *it was coming from Mexico*. "We gotta get something out!" he said. He meant a press release. The Sheriff gathered eight or nine aides around a big table in his office. "Illegal Immigration Breeds Crime, Disease," Arpaio suggested. "Can we get masks for the deputies at the tents? ICE"—Immigration and Customs Enforcement—"has masks, don't they? We should close the border."

The press-release team included Lisa Allen and other members of the media-relations unit; a jail administrator; a public-health specialist; and two deputies from the Sheriff's human-smuggling unit, who had brought with them a map of Mexico. "Ninety, ninety-five per cent of the people we apprehend are from Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas," one of the deputies said, spreading out the map. "The south." He and his partner were the odd men out at the meeting. Everyone else was in business attire; the deputies wore bluejeans and black T-shirts and carried pistols on their hips. Both deeply tanned, with sunglasses pushed up on crewcuts, they were also the only Latinos present. People silently studied the map. Finally, Lisa Allen said, "Mexico City is where?"

Arpaio was getting impatient. Len Sherman, who co-wrote both of the Sheriff's books, said firmly, "The story here is that Homeland Security is doing nothing about this, just like New Orleans. So we're taking action."

The public-health specialist said gently, "Surgical masks do nothing to combat this virus."

Arpaio erupted. "This is my press release! I'm the sheriff! I have some knowledge! I'm not just some little old sheriff!" He told a complicated story about a Nixon-era anti-narcotics program called Operation Intercept, which he said he ran with G. Gordon Liddy, and which nearly closed the border with Mexico for ten days in 1969.

Len Sherman nodded thoughtfully. "So you're saying that swine flu is an opportunity to solve other problems."

"Yes!"

The meeting went on for close to an hour. The Sheriff was called away to an

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MEATLOAF

1.
Twenty-five years ago, Kurt Schwitters,
I tried to instruct you in baseball
but kept getting distracted, gluing
bits and pieces of world history
alongside personal anecdote
instead of explicating baseball's
habits. I was K.C. (for Casey)
in stanzas of nine times nine times nine.
Last year the Sox were ahead by twelve

2.
in May, by four in August—collapsed
as usual—then won the Series.
Jennifer, who loved baseball, enjoyed
the game on TV but fell asleep
by the fifth inning. She died twelve years
ago, and thus would be sixty now
watching baseball as her hair turned white.
I see her tending her hollyhocks,
gazing west at Eagle Pond, walking

3.
to the porch favoring her right knee.
I live alone with baseball each night
but without poems. One of my friends
called "Baseball" *almost* poetry. No
more vowels carrying images
leap suddenly from my excited
unwitting mind and purple Bic pen.
As he aged, Auden said that methods
of dry farming may also grow crops.

4.
When Jennifer died I had nightmares
that she left me for somebody else.
I bought condoms, looking for affairs,
as distracting as Red Sox baseball
and even more subject to failure.
There was love, there was comfort; always
something was wrong, or went wrong later
—her adultery, my neediness—
until after years I found Lauren.

5.
When I was named Poet Laureate,
the kids of Danbury School painted
baseballs on a kitchen chair for me,
with two lines from "Casey at the Bat."
In fall I lost sixty pounds, and lost
poetry. I studied only "Law

and Order." My son took from my house
the eight-sided Mossberg .22
my father gave me when I was twelve.

6.
Buy two pounds of cheap fat hamburger
so the meatloaf will be sweet, chop up
a big onion, add leaves of basil,
Tabasco, newspaper ads, soy sauce,
quail eggs, driftwood, tomato ketchup,
and library paste. Bake for ten hours
at thirty-five degrees. When pitchers
hit the batter's head, Kurt, it is called
a beanball. The batter takes first base.

7.
After snowdrifts melted in April,
I gained pounds back, and with Lauren flew
to Paris, eating all day: croissants
warm, crisp, and buttery, then baguettes
Camembert, at last bœuf bourguignon
with bottles of red wine. Afternoons
we spent in the Luxembourg Gardens
or in museums: the Marmottan!
The Pompidou! The Orangerie!

8.
The Musée de la Vie Romantique!
The Louvre! The d'Orsay! The Jeu de
Paume! The Musée Maillol! The Petit
Palais! When the great Ted Williams died,
his son detached his head and froze it
in a Scottsdale depository.
In summer, enduring my dotage,
I try making this waterless farm,
Meatloaf, with many ingredients.

9.
In August Lauren climbs Mt. Kearsarge,
where I last clambered in middle age,
while I sit in my idle body
in the car, in the cool parking lot,
revising these lines for Kurt Schwitters,
counting nine syllables on fingers
discolored by old age and felt pens,
my stanzas like ballplayers sent down
to Triple A, too slow for the bigs.

—*Donald Hall*

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interview, which he conducted on speakerphone from his desk. His department's executive offices are situated, strangely, on two high floors of a bank tower in downtown Phoenix. They command a tremendous view of suburban sprawl in all directions. Outside, it was hot and hazy; inside, it was icy. The Sheriff's office is the size of a midrange convenience store, its dark wood-panelled walls crowded with memorabilia, including an illustration celebrating the 2001 World Series victory of the Arizona Diamondbacks, with Arpaio's face drawn bigger than even Randy Johnson's, as if the Sheriff had been the Series M.V.P.

The interviewer on the phone wanted to know if Arpaio thought schoolchildren should be asked about their immigration status.

"Yeah. Anything."

"Aren't you concerned about putting schools in that position?"

The Sheriff waved at Sherman, stage-whispering, "What do I say here?"

Sherman: "Drugs in schools."

"I can equate that to drug testing," Arpaio told the interviewer. "It's controversial."

Sherman, who is from New York, later told me, "He's an idiot savant. What he knows, he knows, and that's all he knows. I once saw him debate Alan Dershowitz, and I thought Dershowitz's head was going to explode."

Arpaio walked back to the press-release meeting, interrupting a recitation of facts by the public-health specialist. "Forget this medical stuff," he said. "We're talking about drop houses and human smuggling. I think we should start off with a paragraph about how I'm concerned about the illegals coming over the border. We can't say they're all Mexicans. That would be racial profiling."

Later, Arpaio said, "Can we throw 287(g) in there, give it a little credit?" He was referring to a federal program that allows state and local officers to be cross-trained by Homeland Security and work in immigration enforcement. The Maricopa County sheriff's office has had more people trained under 287(g) than any other police agency in the country. Arpaio suggested a line: "Arpaio ordered that every detainee be asked by a 287(g) officer what country they came from." Allen and Sherman wrote that down.

A deputy in the media-relations unit

checked his BlackBerry and announced, "Gordon went out at two o'clock." He meant that the Phoenix mayor had held a press conference.

"About the flu?"

"Yeah."

"That piece of shit! What did he say?"

"I don't know."

The deputies from the human-smuggling unit left with their map of Mexico. I followed them out, and we talked in a conference room. They were Detective Carlos Rangel and Sergeant Manny Madrid. They had been doing this work for two or three years, they said, and 287(g) had made a big difference. "We can now determine alienage," Madrid said.

Rangel, who grew up in the border town of Mexicali, said, "I thought it would change, that the numbers we catch would drop because people would hear Maricopa was a tough county. But it hasn't."

Madrid disagreed. He thought smuggling vans were getting harder to find. "Maybe they're changing their tactics."

Rangel said, "Plenty of people come up and thank us for our work." Madrid nodded. Then Rangel added, "But those people are a hundred per cent Caucasian. I've never had a non-Caucasian thank me."

The Sheriff took me to the tents the next day. But first he gave me the swine-flu press release that his staff had produced the night before. He has a stagy way of speaking out of the side of his mouth when he wants to share something possibly confidential. "If you got any buddies in New York, throw this to 'em," he said, handing me the press release. "I always send my stuff national."

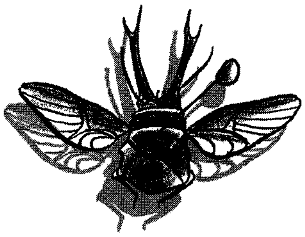
Arpaio seems to live and die by the press release. When I met up with him in New York, before an appearance on "The Colbert Report," he was under attack back home, he told me, "for going on a comedy show when I could be testifying" at a Senate hearing on border violence that was being held in Arizona. The problem, he explained, was that the hearing, which was being held by Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman, was taking place in Phoenix City Hall—the headquarters of his enemy Mayor Gordon. "Why would I go to Gordon's office when he's calling me a racist? I did a nice media release, saying I didn't want to disrupt the dignity of the proceedings—because there are demonstrators out there every day, demonstrating against me. But nobody's printing my press release." He sounded almost hurt. I later heard him tell a journalism class at Arizona State University, "I used to have trust with reporters. Give them scoops. Those were the old days. It's very strange, when you give a story and it doesn't come out the right way."

The swine-flu press release didn't call for closing the U.S.-Mexico border (Maricopa County is not, incidentally, on the border) but it did note Arpaio's "unwavering fight to slow the tide of illegal immigration" and warn that the swine flu should "serve as a wake-up call." Arpaio's "instrumental part" in Operation Intercept, in 1969, also got a mention.

At the entrance to Tent City Jail is a sign: "ILLEGAL ALIENS ARE PROHIBITED FROM VISITING ANYONE IN THIS JAIL."

We swept through an outbuilding, past startled deputies, and into a dusty yard full of rows of twenty-two-man canvas tents. "I'm risking my life for you," Arpaio said—referring, I gathered, to swine flu. The sides of the tents had been rolled up in the heat. Prisoners in striped outfits lay on bunks, watching us approach. We went into the first tent. The Sheriff and one of his men hurried down the narrow passage between the bunks and out the other side. I stopped midway, and asked the inmates if they felt like talking. They did.

They were all Latinos. They came from Mexico, Honduras, California, Arizona. Some had been in the tents for nearly a year. Their families were afraid to visit them, because they didn't have papers. They were all facing deportation. The jail food was very bad, they said, and they were always hungry. A slender eighteen-year-old named José Aguilar said that he had lost fifty pounds since being locked up. He showed me a photograph of himself, taken when he was arrested, which had been laminated on a plastic I.D. bracelet, and he had certainly lost weight since then. Aguilar said that he had been in Phoenix since he was a baby, and knew no one in Mexico; his first language was English. An older guy craned his head around to make sure no guards could hear him, then said, "Arpaio is illegal. He's not really from North America."



I asked if Arpaio had any nicknames in the tents.

"Hitler."

"Hitler."

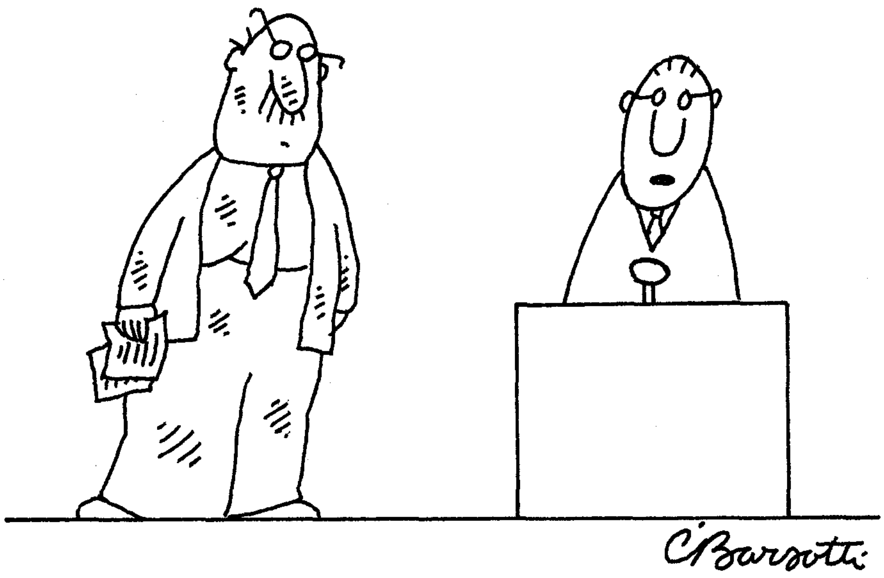
A fan was moving air around at one end of the tent, but the heat was ferocious, and it was not yet summer. I could hear Arpaio yelling for me to come out. He sent a guard in to get me. Outside, I found the Sheriff talking to a local TV news crew. I made the mistake of mentioning that I had interviewed, inside the tent, an inmate from Mexico City. The Sheriff sent a guard back in to fetch him. Mexico City was, in Arpaio's mind, the epicenter of swine flu. He wanted this guy on TV. And so Fidel Sánchez found himself being questioned by a bilingual newswoman about his infected home town while Sheriff Joe stood by, arms folded, staring balefully into the camera. Arpaio has a big, round head, and there is something turtle-like about his posture.

"The Sheriff, he's a dynamo," a guard murmured to me. "He can stay out here all day, go on sweeps at night, and be ready to go in the morning with a cup of coffee. Puts the rest of us to shame."

Arpaio, with his inhuman energy, had probably escorted hundreds of camera crews and reporters through his beloved tent jail. Many had been appalled, and produced unflattering stories. Plenty of others had simply served up the Toughest Sheriff shtick with relish—the British tabloid the *Sun*, in a 2007 story, seemed ready to buy out Arpaio's contract and take him with them to straighten out the bad guys back home. Arpaio's main concern seems to be just that he is covered. When I first met Lisa Allen at his offices, she looked at my business card and said, "You'll probably tear us a new one, but come on in." Arpaio admits that he gets tired of being called a publicity hound, but says he simply has to get his message out—"I don't have the budget to do it myself." He does have the budget, though, to employ Allen and the rest of his unusually serious media-relations unit.

On the way back to Phoenix from the tents, the Sheriff got a call, which he put on speakerphone. Someone named Jim, who sounded like a deputy, was calling from the courthouse. He said he was observing jury selection in a case there. "Sheriff, there was a lady who said, 'Let's put it this way. Joe's my hero.' So the next lady says, 'Joe is *not* my hero.' Then she says she's the wife of the mayor of Mesa."

"I knew it!" Arpaio said to one of his men. "I never trusted that mayor. He's pro-immigrant. He's never going to fire that chief. We gotta raid Mesa again."



"Our next speaker looked into the abyss and made a few notes."

There are at least twenty-five law-enforcement agencies in Maricopa County. All utilize the county jail. The sheriff's office is responsible for policing unincorporated areas as well as those smaller communities which contract for its services. In towns and cities with their own police, the sheriff's deputies must, in theory, tread lightly. Arpaio has had a number of run-ins with his fellow-lawmen, and his present obsession with illegal immigrants has made things even more tense.

Some of the disagreements are basic. For instance, Arpaio and the county attorney, Andrew Thomas, who shares his views, have settled on a novel interpretation of a state law against human smuggling. The law's target is, of course, smugglers, known as coyotes, but Arpaio and Thomas charge undocumented immigrants, the coyotes' cargo, as "co-conspirators" in their own smuggling. This is a Class 4 felony, which makes the suspects ineligible for bond, and is one reason that Arpaio's jails are so full. Maricopa is the only one of Arizona's fifteen counties that interprets the law this way, and the sheriff's office is the only agency among the twenty-five in Maricopa that does so. The others figure—and a few are vocal about it—that their limited resources are better spent fighting more serious crime.

George Gascón, the chief of police in Mesa—the man whom, Arpaio had bitterly remarked, the mayor was "never going to fire"—has stoutly opposed Arpaio. Mesa is a big town, east of Phoenix, with a population of half a million—larger than that of Cleveland. Gascón, who was an assistant police chief in Los Angeles before taking the Mesa job, three years ago, has had great success in crime reduction in Mesa, using the CompStat crime-mapping model, developed by William Bratton in New York and Los Angeles. But his first challenge in Mesa, he told me, had been to gain the trust of minority communities, particularly Latinos. "They need to believe that you're ethical and honest, that you're not the enemy," he said. In Los Angeles, he had seen what happened when that trust was broken by corrupt officers. No one would talk to the cops, "gang members filled the power void," and crime flourished. With victims and witnesses, or with people stopped for civil violations, Gascón's officers do not inquire about immigration status. "We focus on people who are committing predatory crimes."

Gascón, a Cuban-American, is tall, silver-haired, soft-spoken. He is a member of the California bar. He declined to discuss Arpaio. He did say, however, "I'm not an open-borders man. I believe we have a problem with illegal immigration. But I want to make sure we don't throw away the Constitution in the process of solving it." Gascón made it clear from the start that Arpaio's military-style immigration sweeps were not welcome in Mesa.

That didn't stop Sheriff Joe. Last October, he sent sixty detectives and posse volunteers into Mesa after midnight. The plan was to raid the Mesa city hall and the public library, to look for undocumented janitors who, according to the sheriff's office, were suspected of identification theft. Gascón was not notified beforehand. (Arpaio claims that he did inform someone at Mesa police headquarters about the raid.) A Mesa police officer spotted a large group of heavily armed men in flak jackets gathering silently in a downtown park. Gascón, when I asked about the episode, took a deep breath. "It was a very, very dangerous scenario," he said. "In my entire law-enforcement career, I have never heard of anything close to this." His officers managed to identify the armed men, but then had trouble getting a straight story from them. The raid eventually went forward, monitored by the Mesa police, and resulted in the arrests of three middle-aged cleaning women. (Arpaio's press release said that another thirteen suspected illegal immigrants were arrested later at their homes.) This was the context for Arpaio's remark "We gotta raid Mesa again."

Two reporters at the *East Valley Tribune*, a Maricopa County paper, did a five-part study last year of the operations of the sheriff's office. They found that, with the diversion of resources to pursuing undocumented immigrants, response times on emergency calls to the sheriff's office had increased significantly, arrest rates had dropped, and dozens of violent crimes were never investigated. The series won a Pulitzer Prize for local reporting. Arpaio rejected its findings and, four months after it was published, won reëlection.

His local opponents, including church groups, the N.A.A.C.P., ACORN, and other community organizations, not to mention Mayor Gordon, of Phoenix, have asked the federal government to investigate possible civil-rights violations by Arpaio's office. Large-scale street protests, including mass marches to the jails, are mounted every few months. Al Sharpton did eventually show up in Phoenix, for one day in mid-June. He denounced racial profiling, met privately with the Sheriff, and announced plans to stage modern-day "freedom rides" in Maricopa County. That evening, he and Arpaio appeared together on Lou Dobbs's show.

The immediate goal of Arpaio's opponents is to persuade the Department of Homeland Security to cancel its 287(g) contract with Maricopa County. Modest as that sounds, activists believe it would make a difference, reducing the power of sheriff's deputies and crimping, however slightly, the culture of impunity that has flourished under Arpaio.

But Janet Napolitano, President Obama's Secretary of Homeland Security, has a history with Arpaio. She was the U.S. Attorney for Arizona when conditions in Arpaio's jails were first investigated by the Justice Department, in the mid-nineteen-nineties. Her performance then was memorably weak. Despite receiving a devastating federal report on brutality inside the jails, she held a friendly press conference with Arpaio in which she announced the settlement of the case against him and, according to the *Arizona Republic*, passed the time "trading compliments with the sheriff." Later, as the state's attorney general, she stood by as Sheriff Joe ran his jails any way he pleased. Then, when she ran for governor in 2002, Arpaio returned the favor by crossing party lines—Napolitano is a Democrat—and making a last-minute campaign commercial for her that, by all accounts, helped her eke out a victory. In 2008, in her second term as governor, Napolitano, a moderate on immigration, finally opposed Arpaio, ordering that $1.6 million in state funds going to his office be used not for immigration sweeps but for the investigation of felonies. Arpaio was furious and later got his funding reinstated. His opponents in Maricopa County wonder privately about Napolitano's willingness to defy him again, even from a Cabinet position. Last week, she announced a revision of the 287(g) program, intended to make local agencies more accountable. But, according to her office, ending Homeland Security's partnership with Arpaio is not under consideration.

I met a large family west of Phoenix whom I'll call the Ortegas. Two brothers—both husbands, fathers, and homeowners—had been arrested during a raid on a company where they worked. The men were still in jail, awaiting trial on charges of using invented Social Security numbers. Both were undocumented immigrants from western Mexico. A third brother, who has residence papers, was able to visit them in jail. I talked to him and his wife, and to the wife and the oldest son of one of the jailed men, in a cream-colored suburban living room.

"My husband has been here in Arizona since 1992," the wife of the jailed man said in Spanish. She wore a green T-shirt and, as she spoke, slowly wrung her hands. "He's been working and working, paying his taxes. He doesn't drink, gamble—nothing. Our children were born here. It's very hard with them. We tell the little ones he's in Mexico, taking care of his mother. But their cousins tell them he's in jail. They don't understand why their father, who's a good man, is in jail. They say, 'Is he bad? Don't lie to me, Mama.' " She added, "We've paid three thousand dollars to lawyers. We had to stop making house payments, but I don't care. We're living off his tax return now."

Her sister-in-law said, "Everything that's happening here is the fault of the federal government, because they empowered Arpaio."

The third brother cleared his throat, as if he might not agree. He was legal and had a solid job, as a farm supervisor, but most of the field hands at the farm were undocumented. He said, "Everybody's just trying to keep their noses clean, hoping there will be an immigration reform."

"Arpaio gets egged on by the national publicity he gets," his wife said. To her sister-in-law, she said, "If you lose your house, you can come and sleep here on the couch."

I asked the son of the jailed man, who was sitting with us but kept his eyes on the floor, his age. "I'm thirteen," he said, in English. He was tall and skinny, with huge eyes and a child's mouth. He wore a black baseball cap inscribed "Drug Free and Proud." He spoke very softly. "Who's going to pay the house bills? Where are we going to live? Am I still going to go to school?" Tears began rolling down his face.

"All he does is study," his mother said to me.

There was talk about legal strategies, about what could be tried. "We're just hoping to get in front of Immigration and get *un permiso*."

"I'm not as strong as I want to be," the wife of the jailed man said. "But I'm trying to keep the faith. We're not going to give up. *Sí se puede*."

Her sister-in-law turned to me and said, "We're like this." She held up her fingers, framing something the size of an ant. "*Como así*. Small. And Arpaio is a giant—*un gigante*."

The Ortegas asked me again not to identify them. Arpaio, they said, "does retaliation." They seemed terrified that he might show up at their door.

Russell Pearce is a state legislator from Mesa. His specialty is anti-immigrant legislation. Much of what he introduces is beyond the pale, even in Arizona. He has tried to force landlords to ascertain the immigration status of their tenants, couples to produce Social Security numbers and proof of citizenship before they can be married, and even hospitals to stop issuing birth certificates—never mind the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution—if there is a question about the immigration status of the parents. (Pearce can be outré in other areas as well. One law that he supported would have allowed concealed weapons in schools.) Yet Pearce has had some success: he helped pass a law that imposes sanctions on businesses that employ illegal immigrants—the toughest such law in the nation—and ballot measures making English the official state language and blocking access for the undocumented to day care and in-state college tuition.

"They should get nothing, nothing," Pearce told me. "Not K-12, nothing. Disneyland learned this a long time ago. You want the people to go home? Turn out the lights. Shut down the rides."

America, Pearce often says, has been "invaded," and the Fifth Column that abets this invasion is, he told me, an unusual alliance of "big business, folks with thick checkbooks on K Street, the corporate oligarchy," and "anarchists and seditionists."

I hadn't noticed many anarchists in Arizona.

Pearce said, "They're huge. La Raza, the A.C.L.U."

More self-evident is the appeal of cheap labor to employers. Whether the Arizona economy could survive without undocumented immigrants picking lettuce and cleaning hotel rooms is an open question.

In any case, Pearce and Arpaio are allies. They are heroes to the same nativist

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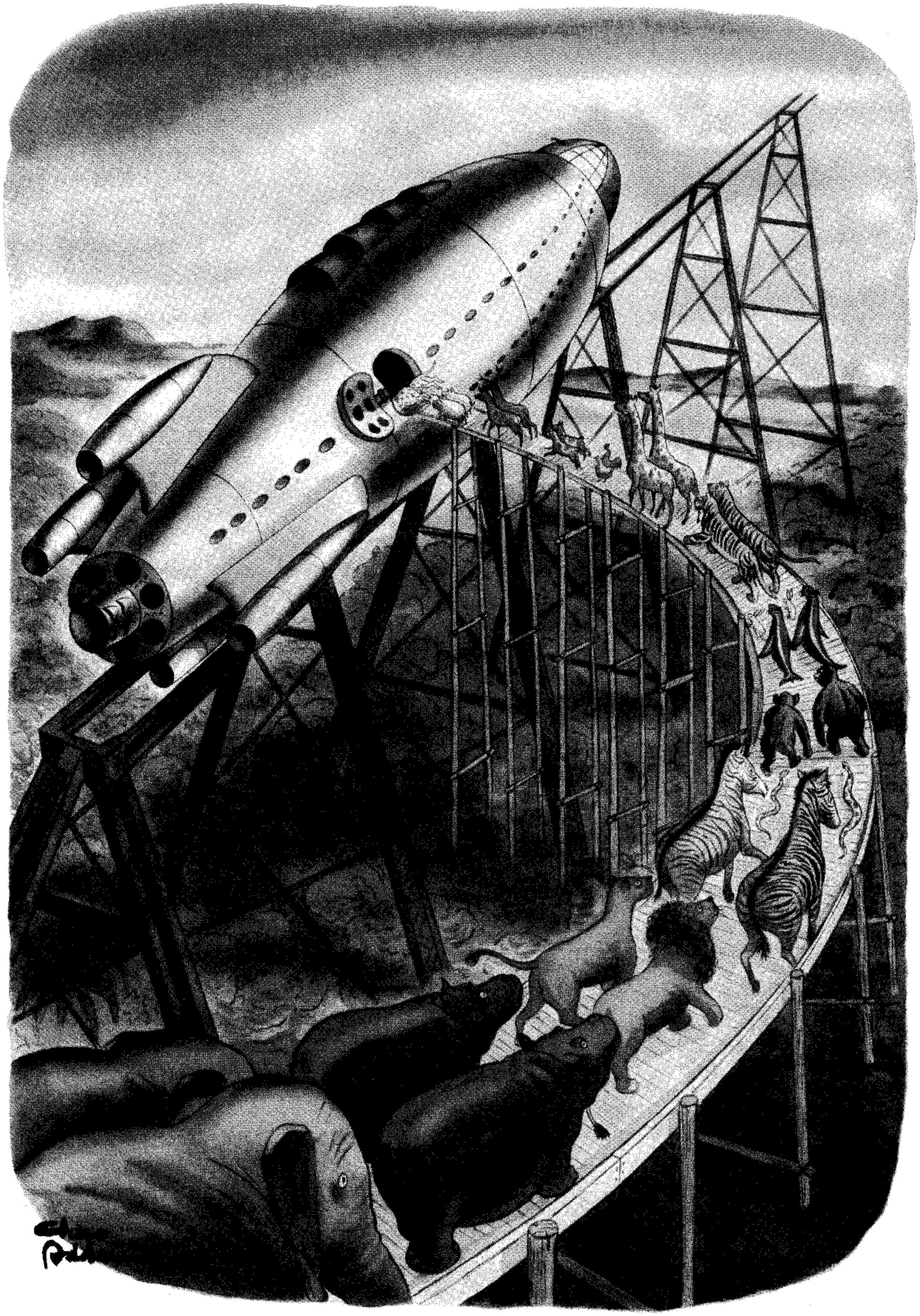
FROM THE ARCHIVES BY CHARLES ADDAMS



groups. They even have the same painting, "The Prayer at Valley Forge," which shows George Washington kneeling in the snow next to his horse, on their respective office walls.

But Arpaio and Pearce were not always buddies. Pearce worked at the Maricopa County sheriff's office for twenty-three years, rising to chief deputy, and he reportedly clashed with Arpaio there. (Pearce still claims that the Tent City jail was his idea.) In 2004, Pearce's son, Sean, also a sheriff's deputy, was wounded by an illegal immigrant during a raid, and Sean's wife, Melissa, angry with the Sheriff, decided to attend a meeting for a group called Mothers Against Arpaio, which was seeking a special recall election. Most of the members of Mothers Against Arpaio were relatives of victims of abuse inside Maricopa County jails. (The recall effort was unsuccessful.)

There is also the awkward fact that Arpaio came late to the issue of illegal immigration. Indeed, he for many years publicly assumed the same attitude toward immigration-law enforcement that most local police chiefs do: more serious crimes deserve precedence. Arpaio was always tougher on prisoners than he was on crime, but he also immersed himself in a series of high-profile campaigns—the war on drugs, reducing cruelty to animals, driving prostitution out of Maricopa. A 2003 anti-prostitution sweep backfired when some members of his vast volunteer posse got naked, on video, with prostitutes they were supposedly arresting. This went sufficiently far beyond the call of duty that the county attorney was unable to file charges. Arpaio, struggling to put this embarrassment behind him, and seeing the success with which other local conservative politicians were wielding the anti-immigrant club, soon picked it up himself.

Mary Rose Wilcox, who is Latina and the only Democrat on the Maricopa County board of supervisors, remembers a quite different sheriff. "Arpaio was not like this before," she told me. "He was flamboyant. But I don't know this guy." For Wilcox, the last straw came this February, when Arpaio marched more than two hundred undocumented immigrants, shackled together, to a new tent jail, parading them before news cameras. Arpaio had staged prisoner marches before. In 2005, he forced nearly seven hundred prisoners, wearing nothing but pink underwear and flip-flops, to shuffle four blocks through the Arizona heat, pink-handcuffed together, to a new jail. When they arrived, one prisoner was made to cut a pink ribbon for the cameras. This elaborate degradation, which is remembered fondly by Sheriff Joe's fans, was ostensibly in the name of security—the men were strip-searched both before and after the march. But Arpaio also told reporters, "I put them on the street so everybody could see them." He marched another nine hundred this April.

Wilcox is a restaurant owner with an earnest, matronly air. She told me about a youth program she runs in inner-city Phoenix. "It's for fifth-grade kids who live near the ballpark but would never be able to afford to go to a Diamondbacks game," she said. "They all do community-service work, about a thousand of them, and then they get to go to a game. Sheriff's deputies always helped me with the program till two years ago. But I had to ask them to stop. The kids are just too afraid of those brown shirts. That's what their teachers told me. And I hate to say it but the Sheriff is responsible for all this fear."

We were eating chiles rellenos in Wilcox's restaurant, a modest family-run place with portraits of César Chávez and Martin Luther King, Jr., on the walls. Wilcox stopped eating. "It's like a big joke to him," she said. "He has no idea the harm he's doing—to children, families, communities."

"Be a real sheriff," the producer said. "You don't want to be a clown sheriff."

Arpaio seemed to take this advice in stride. We were in New York, and he was about to be interviewed on "The Colbert Report." "Is this the greenroom?" he asked. "These walls are blue. Are they going to powder me?"

The producer, an intense young woman, persisted. "Don't try to be funny," she said. "He will be funnier than you."

Arpaio shrugged. He wasn't familiar with Colbert's show. "I'm pretty funny," he said. From a rumpled manila envelope, he pulled two pairs of pink boxer shorts. "I brought the underwear," he said.

The producer stared. An assistant looked on helplessly. Then the producer reached for the shorts. "Thanks," she said.

"Don't you want me to take these on the show?"

"No."

Arpaio looked nonplussed. "Well, at least let me sign 'em." He autographed the shorts—one pair for Colbert ("Stay out of jail!"), one for the producer's son.

Stephen Colbert popped in and introduced himself. "I will be in character out there," he warned Arpaio. "My character is an idiot. He doesn't understand *anything*." While he spoke, the producer and the assistant chanted at Arpaio, "Set him straight! Set him straight!"

"First marriage?"

Arpaio wanted to make sure his new book would be plugged on the show. That was why he had come to New York. Colbert assured him that it would, and left to start taping.

Arpaio watched the opening monologue on a monitor, but soon grew bored. He is not accustomed to meeting people who don't know about the pink underwear. "Where's my powder?" he called out the doorway. No one replied.

Colbert's first guest got the Sheriff's attention. It was Ken Quinn, a second mate from the American container ship that was hijacked off Somalia in April. Quinn barely got to speak, between Colbert's jokes, but he had a good-natured grin and broad shoulders, and the studio audience gave him a standing ovation. Arpaio seemed jealous. "The *Republic* did a poll last week, 'Who's your hero?,' and I beat out Tillman," he said. He meant Pat Tillman, the Arizona Cardinals football star who joined the Army Rangers and was killed in Afghanistan. "I beat out all these guys. I'm not bragging. I'm just saying." (The poll, published in May, actually shows Tillman as the winner and Arpaio as a runner-up.)

Except for the ovation, Arpaio's turn with Colbert went much like Quinn's: the Sheriff hardly got a word in. He did manage to growl one stock line: "I'm an equal-opportunity law-enforcement guy—I lock everybody up." Colbert, having mentioned that Arpaio is often accused of racial profiling, kept asking the Sheriff for I.D.

As Arpaio left the studio, by an unmarked door on West Fifty-fourth Street, a bushy-haired young man waiting outside turned and bellowed, "Never come back here again! Fuck you!" Arpaio ducked into a town car, which sped away into the night. "Scumbag," he muttered. The Sheriff hadn't thought much of Colbert. He hadn't thought much of Conan O'Brien, either, he said. "I'm working on Leno. He's from my home state, Massachusetts. And my home country, Italy. I said, 'Hey, Jay, why don't you have me on your show? Afraid I'll be funnier than you?' "

Back in Maricopa County, the Justice Department was pursuing the investigation requested by Congress in March. Other federal officials were also snooping around. I heard Sheriff Joe tell his jail supervisor about an awkward interview he had just had with someone from Homeland Security. "He wouldn't even take my underwear."

"He's a bean counter," the supervisor said.

David Hendershott, Arpaio's chief deputy, seemed to be in charge of handling the Justice people. Hendershott is an enormous man, with enormous self-confidence and an office nearly as enormous as Arpaio's. He polishes the Sheriff's image at every opportunity. Not realizing, for instance, that I had already been to the Tent City jail with Arpaio, Hendershott told me, "Every time he goes to the tents, it's like a rock concert. Everybody wants his autograph. They'll have him sign toilet paper, anything."

The key question about the federal investigation, Hendershott said, was "Is it an organized conspiracy to muzzle Sheriff Joe Arpaio by using the Justice Department?" He had been doing some Internet research on the chief of the civil-rights division, he said, and decided that she must be unpopular with at least some of her staff. He brandished a thick set of printouts, and said, "D.O.J. is going to be surprised that we find the truth to be a very strong ally." Hendershott pointed at a conference table at one end of his office. "I got seven D.O.J. lawyers coming in here tomorrow. And I'm going to shove it up their ass."

He wasn't more specific about his strategy than that, but the bravado itself seemed to be the point. "You think I don't know how the feds operate?" Arpaio had asked the journalism students at Arizona State. "I don't bow down to the federal government."

Guadalupe is one of the small Maricopa communities that have a contract for police protection with the sheriff's office. Its population is almost entirely Latino and Native American, and one day last year Arpaio launched a major raid there, with a helicopter, paddy wagons, and scores of deputies, including helmeted officers on horseback. They stopped and demanded I.D. from pedestrians, motorists—basically every dark-skinned person they saw. (The sheriff's office calls these raids "crime suppression" sweeps, and insists that the raiders stop only people who are violating the law.) It was standard practice, Arpaio style, complete with a press release and news crews. Indeed, it was the third such operation in less than a month. But dusty little Guadalupe is not a standard Maricopa community. It is an old town, a throwback, not given to the transience of urban sprawl. Many of its residents live in the houses they were born in; very few are foreign-born. And few appreciated the invasion by Sheriff Joe and his team.

Protesters materialized, many waving homemade placards urging Arpaio to leave. Motorists honked in support. Guadalupe's young mayor, Rebecca Jiménez, confronted Arpaio in a parking lot where he had established his mobile command center. Why, she wanted to know, did his press release say that Guadalupe town officials were alarmed about illegal aliens in their midst? They were not. Arpaio went ballistic. "He was waving his arms like a crazy man," Jiménez told me. "I had to wipe the spit off my face. He said, 'You're the one that caused all these riots!' He said he was going to come back the next day. I said we didn't want him. They did come back. But he didn't."

Arpaio chose to direct the next day's Guadalupe operation, which was more modest, from a remote command post, and Jiménez was hailed, at least in some circles, for her courage. The two-day raid netted only nine suspected illegal immigrants, but reportedly produced a high volume of traffic tickets, including charges for "improper use of horn." Jiménez noted that the raid came in the middle of an election campaign. "He used our community to get media attention," she said. "You know, Brown Town. But he got more than he bargained for."

The Guadalupe raid did have a chilling effect. It began the day before a Catholic-church confirmation ceremony—a big deal in Guadalupe—was scheduled to take place in the village plaza, and although the children had prepared for months, a number of them were afraid to come out, and missed their own confirmations.

America's toughest sheriff is, as ever, unapologetic. Over lunch in New York, he told me that he doesn't mind the effect he has. "If they're afraid to go to church, that's good." ♦

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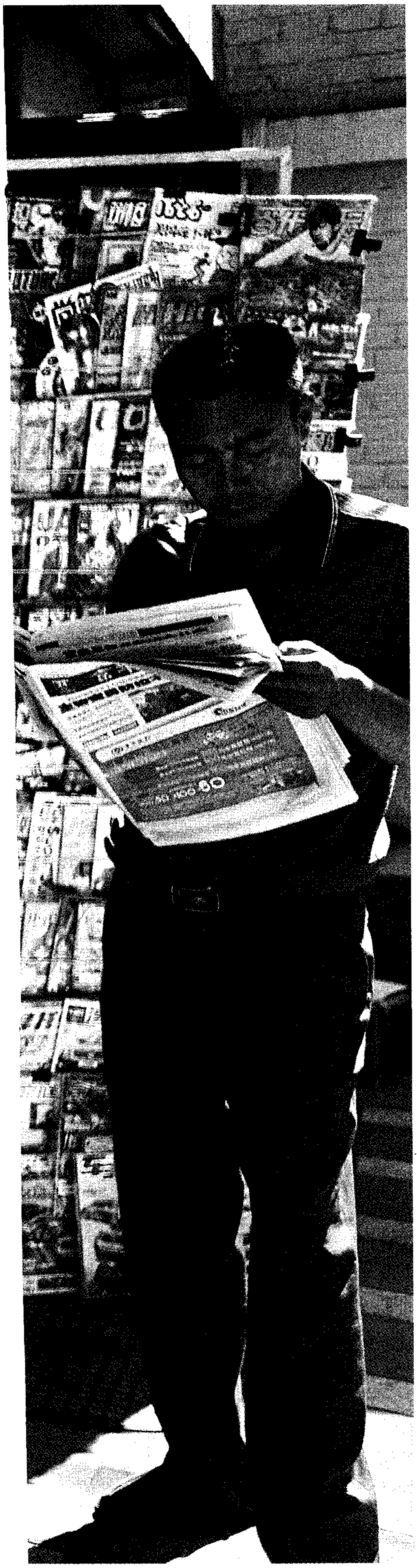
Hu Shuli, the muckraking founder of the magazine Caijing, has continued to flourish long after other Chinese journalists have been impriso



silenced. Photograph by Mark Leong.

LETTER FROM CHINA

THE FORBIDDEN ZONE

How far can a provocative editor go?

BY EVAN OSNOS

On May 12, 2008, Hu Shuli, the founding editor of the biweekly magazine *Caijing*, was hosting a ceremony for scholarship recipients at a hotel in the mountains west of Beijing. When a text message informed her that a powerful earthquake had struck the province of Sichuan, she leaned over to the man next to her, a veteran editor named Qian Gang, who had covered previous quakes, and asked him for a rough prediction of the damage. At least it hadn't struck while everyone was asleep, he figured. He soon realized, however, that school was in session and "the casualties among students would be enormous."

Hu set off for downtown Beijing, working the phone and e-mailing from the back seat of a car, directing her staff to rent a satellite phone and get a crew to Sichuan. Petite, voluble, and pugnacious—"a female Godfather," one of her reporters thought upon first meeting her—Hu was determined to cover the story even though in China reporting on a disaster of this scale could be politically hazardous. When the country suffered its previous huge quake, in 1976, the government suppressed news of the death toll for three years.

But Hu had made her name divining the boundaries of free expression in China. In the decade since she founded *Caijing*—the name means "finance and economics"—she had sharply defied the image of China's somnambulant press, and become, as David Ignatius, of the Washington *Post*, put it to me, the country's "avenging angel." Hu had endured as editor long after other tenacious Chinese journalists had been imprisoned or silenced. She was often described in the Chinese and foreign press as "the most dangerous woman in China," and she was still in business.

Within the hour, the first *Caijing* journalist was on a flight to Sichuan, followed by nine more. While Xinhua, the state-run news service, was emphasizing that the earthquake "tugged at the heartstrings of the Chinese Communist Party," *Caijing* was ferreting out estimates of the numbers of the dead and wounded and noting that "many disaster victims have yet to receive any relief supplies."

Schools lay in heaps of concrete and rebar, and the Central Propaganda Department, a government agency with the power to remove editors and shut down publications, banned coverage of rescue efforts at the schools. Several Chinese newspapers questioned why so many schools had collapsed anyway, producing poignant stories of construction errors and the human toll. (At least fifty-three hundred schoolchildren are believed to have died.) Hu had heard that local authorities were criticizing papers that continued to report on the schools' collapse, but she believed that *Caijing* could find a way to write about it. She thought that a story could be published if it carried the right tone and facts. "If it's not absolutely forbidden," she said, "we do it."

On June 9th, *Caijing* published a twelve-page investigative report that was cool and definitive. According to the report, heedless economic growth, squandered public funds, and rampant neglect of construction standards had led to the disaster. The story detailed how local cadres cut corners, but it stopped short of assigning responsibility by name. When I asked Hu about the government's reaction, she said, "They got angry. Very, very angry." But she and *Caijing* were never punished.

In the world of Chinese journalists, or "news workers," as they are known in Party-speak, Hu, who is fifty-six years old, has a singular profile. She is an incurable muckraker, and in 1989 was suspended from a reporting job because of her sympathy for the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, yet she has gone on to cultivate first-name familiarity with

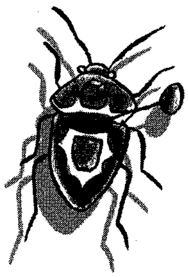
REDUX

some of China’s most powerful Party leaders.

Five feet two and slim, with a pixie haircut and a wardrobe of color-coördinated outfits, she is usually heard before she is seen. In the newsroom of *Caijing*, a sleek and open gray brick space on the nineteenth floor of the Prime Tower, in downtown Beijing, her arrival is heralded by the urgent *click-clack* of heels down the hallway. She sweeps through the newsroom, spouting decrees and ideas, and then heads out the door again—“as sudden and rash as a gust of wind,” said Qian, who is now a researcher at the University of Hong Kong.

More than one person I know likens the experience of chatting with Hu to being on the receiving end of machine-gun fire. Some have less appetite for her intensity. Wang Lang, an old friend of Hu’s and an editor at *Economic Daily*, a state-run newspaper, has repeatedly declined her offers to work together, because, he said, “Keeping some distance is better for our friendship.” Depending on the point of view, being with her is either thrilling or unnerving. Her boss, Wang Boming, the chairman of *Caijing’s* parent company, the SEEC Media Group, told me, half jokingly, “I’m afraid of her!”

Since 1998, when Hu established *Caijing*, with two computers and a borrowed conference room, she has guided the magazine with near-perfect pitch for how much candor and provocation the regime will tolerate. That has meant deciding what to cover—rampant corporate fraud, the government coverup of the SARS virus, case after case of political corruption—but also what not to cover (Falun Gong, the Tiananmen Square anniversary). At a time when the American print media is in decline, the Chinese press is growing, and *Caijing* is the first Chinese publication with the prospect of becoming a world-class news organization. “It’s different from everything you see in China,” Andy Xie, a former Morgan Stanley economist who writes a column for *Caijing*, said. “Its existence, in a way, is a miracle.”



Caijing has the glossy feel and design of *Fortune*. It is heavy with advertising, for Cartier watches, Chinese credit cards, Mercedes S.U.V.s. The writing can be purposefully dense, and even élitist, but China’s propaganda officials are more likely to clamp down on television and mass-market newspapers, which have audiences in the millions, than they are on a magazine that sells only two hundred thousand copies. But those copies go to many of China’s most important offices in government, finance, and academia, giving the magazine extraordinary influence. In recent years, it has begun to expand that reach, through a pair of Web sites, in Chinese and English, that are loosely modelled on nytimes.com. Together, the sites attract some 3.2 million unique visitors every month. Hu writes a widely quoted column for the print edition and the Web. She also oversees a conference series that attracts the economic leadership of the Communist Party. *Caijing’s* newest project, yet to be unveiled, will take direct aim at the likes of Bloomberg and Dow Jones: an English-language wire service, in partnership with the Hong Kong tycoon Richard Li Tzar-kai, that will distribute stories by *Caijing* reporters.

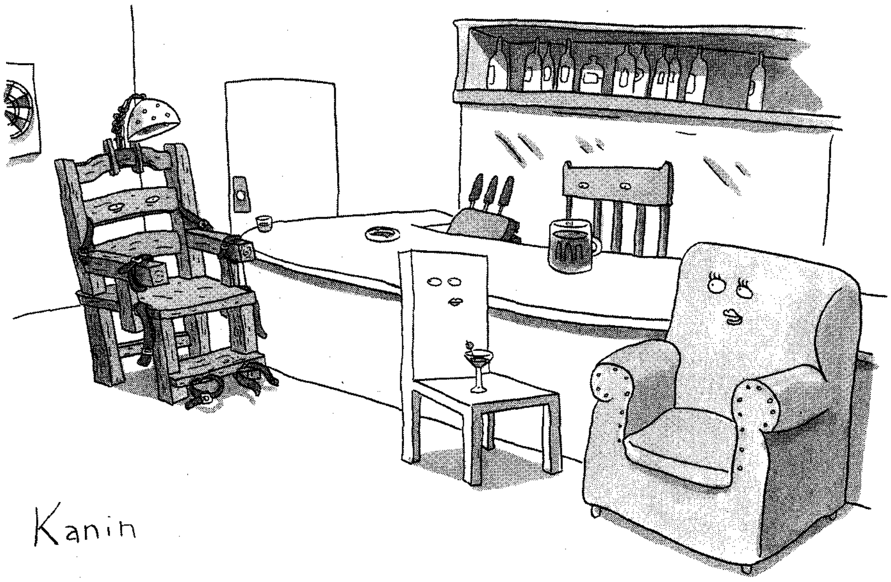
The first time that Sam Popkin, a political scientist at the University of California at San Diego, who, along with his wife, the China scholar Susan Shirk, has known Hu for many years, watched Hu report a story, it reminded him of the portrait of the *Times* reporter R. W. Apple in “The Boys on the Bus,” when “Apple used to make something like a hundred calls a day,” Popkin said. “She is always figuring out who in the system really has the power to know what’s going on.” Popkin added, “She is a human USB drive. You fill her drive, and she goes on to someone else.” Inevitably, her competitors’ memories are the clearest. Nearly two decades ago, Lin Libo, then a reporter for a leading business newspaper, struggled to match her coverage of a round of closed-door negotiations. He recalled, “She even had the menu!”

In 1992, as the international editor at *China Business Times*, one of the country’s first national business papers, Hu began covering the work of a small number of Chinese who had trained in Western finance and, returning from overseas, were promoting the Chinese stock markets. Many of them were her age and were the children of powerful Chinese leaders. The group called itself the Stock Exchange Executive Council, and rented a cluster of rooms at Beijing’s Chongwenmen Hotel. The members pulled out the beds and set up an office. At one desk was Gao Xiqing, who had earned a law degree at Duke and worked at Richard Nixon’s law firm in New York before returning to China. At another was Wang Boming, the son of a former ambassador and vice-foreign minister; Wang had studied finance at Columbia and worked as an economist in the research department of the New York Stock Exchange. They enlisted the support of rising stars in the Party, such as Wang Qishan, who was the son-in-law of a vice-premier, and Zhou Xiaochuan, a reform-minded political scion.

“I decided to interview all the top financiers in China,” Hu recalled. She called it her “homework,” and James McGregor, then a *Wall Street Journal* reporter in Beijing, began noticing Hu “working all these people, pumping them for information like a graduate student talking to esteemed professors.” Hu ended up with a string of scoops and, eventually, an incomparable Rolodex of names destined for China’s highest offices: today, Gao Xiqing is the head of China’s two-hundred-billion-dollar sovereign-wealth fund; Wang Qishan is a vice-premier and a top economic policymaker; Zhou Xiaochuan runs China’s central bank.

Many people in Beijing wonder how much those early connections have protected Hu. But she insists that people overestimate her proximity to power. “I don’t know their birthdays,” she said, of high-ranking officials. “I’m a journalist, and they treat me as a journalist.”

Hu’s connections seem to serve a more subtle function. By positioning herself on the border between insider and outsider, between Communist history and the capitalist present, between protecting China’s interests and embracing the world, she has become an invaluable interpreter. When, in the weeks before the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese government was wound so tightly that it had begun to look thuggish, she used an editorial to condemn clashes between the police and reporters. She preached “self-confidence, open-mindedness, friendliness." "To use an English expression," she added, referring to Chinese organizers, "they should take it easy." It is a delicate role. Once, Hu had to choose the cover photograph for a high-profile year-end edition. Editors had narrowed the choices: a staid collage of newsy images or an edgy shot of a woman shouldering into a sandstorm, her face shrouded in a scarf. Hu favored the provocative picture, but at the last moment she hesitated. "Could it get us into trouble?" she asked, according to someone who was present. "Is it too negative about China?" Others argued that it showed China's best side—its determination—and Hu smiled. "I can explain that," she said.



"Ooh, Margaret, bad boy at six o'clock."

The Chinese press is no longer cowed into complete compliance, but it is also not yet as free as other parts of a raucous economy. *Caijing* and its news values are a minority. Last September, Xinhua published a story on its Web site detailing how China's Shenzhou VII rocket made its thirtieth orbit of the earth. The story had plenty of gripping detail—"The dispatcher's firm voice broke the silence on the ship." Unfortunately, the rocket had yet to be launched. (The news service later apologized for posting a "draft.") Of China's two thousand newspapers and eight thousand magazines, *Caijing* and several business newspapers are among the few publications with independent voices and private funding. (All Chinese media are required to have a government-affiliated sponsor, though the level of interference varies. The SEEC Media Group, which is traded on the Hong Kong stock exchange, is controlled by fifteen individual investors.)

The Chinese leadership has been especially wary of press reform ever since Tiananmen Square. "Never again would China's newspapers, radio, and television be permitted to become a battle front for bourgeois liberalism," President Jiang Zemin vowed, according to internal Party documents collected by Anne-Marie Brady, a specialist on Chinese media at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. Chinese journalists do not face the kind of gangland killings that beset reporters in Russia, but Reporters Without Borders, in its most recent global index of press freedom, ranks China a hundred and sixty-seventh out of a hundred and seventy-three countries—just behind Iran and ahead of Vietnam. Article 35 of the Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the press, but it is no match in court against a web of laws on libel and on revealing state secrets. The Committee to Protect Journalists 2008 report counted twenty-eight reporters in Chinese jails, more than in any other country. (Earlier this month, Iran overtook China, for the first time in ten years.)

The Central Propaganda Department, as it's known in Chinese, operates in semi-secrecy, with no sign on its headquarters and no listed phone number. It issues directives to editors and publishers that outline the latest recommendations of dos and don'ts. Some boundaries are fixed; taboos include the military, religion, ethnic disputes, and the inner workings of government. But others are flexible. In the fall of 2005, editors enjoyed a free hand to report on a catastrophic chemical leak in the Songhua River. Weeks later, news sites were ordered to stop reporting the case of a surgeon who had spoken on the phone during surgery and paralyzed a patient's face. (Even revealing the contents of a directive can be dangerous for a Chinese reporter. Shi Tao, a contributor to the *Contemporary Business News*, is serving a ten-year sentence for describing a directive from his local propaganda authorities in an e-mail that he sent abroad.)

A publication's first offense usually draws a warning "yellow card," as in soccer. Three yellow cards in one year, journalists say, and a paper or magazine is shut down. (In 2004, three hundred and thirty-eight publications were suspended for printing "internal" information, according to a report in the state press.) But it's up to editors themselves to guess how far they can go and compute the risk of exceeding an undefined limit—an approach to censorship that the China scholar Perry Link, a Princeton emeritus professor, has likened to "a giant anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier." "Normally, the great snake doesn't move," he wrote in the *New York Review of Books* in 2002. "It doesn't have to. It feels no need to be clear about its prohibitions. Its silent constant message is 'You yourself decide,' after which, more often than not, everyone in its shadows makes his or her large and small adjustments—all quite 'naturally.'"

The first time that I took a cab to visit Hu at home, I was sure that I was lost. Unlike many of the reporters and editors on her staff, she does not live in one of Beijing's new residential high-rises. She and her husband, Miao Di, a film professor at Beijing's Communication University of China, share a three-bedroom apartment in a concrete housing block with a view of an overgrown garden. In the nineteen-fifties, when the building was a privileged residence for Party cadres, the government assigned space in it to Hu's father. The neighborhood is China's old-media stronghold, home to the headquarters of the state radio and to China's film-and-television censors.

Hu's drive to work takes twenty minutes, and whisks her from one century to another; by the time she reaches the *Caijing* offices, she is next door to the Beijing bureau of the *Wall Street Journal.* Heading to work one recent afternoon, she was running late for an unusual appointment: Hu had decided that her top editors needed new clothes, and she had summoned a tailor. As *Caijing* grows in prominence, her staff is spending more time in front of crowds or overseas. "Foreigners always wear suits this way," she said, approvingly pulling her jacket tightly around her, as she hastened to her car. She had offered her editors a deal: Buy one new suit and the magazine would pay for another. The tailor carried an armful of suits into a conference room, and the staff filed in for a fitting.

"Doesn't it look baggy here?" Hu said, tugging at the underarm of an elegant gray pin-striped jacket being fitted to Wang Shuo, her thirty-seven year-old managing editor. With his boss prodding at his midsection, he wore an expression of bemused tolerance that I had seen several times on a dog in a bathtub.

"It is rather tight already," Wang protested.

"He feels tight already," the tailor said.

"Hold on!" Hu said. "Think about the James Bond suit in the movies. Make it like that!"

The change implied by Hu's flamboyant internationalism runs deeper than aesthetics. A well-meaning American professor once advised her, "If you stay in China as a journalist, you will never really join the international mainstream." She seems determined to prove him wrong.

On her mother's side, Hu comes from a line of Communist Party journalists and intellectuals. Her grandfather Hu Zhongchi was a famous translator and editor at *Shen Bao*, a Shanghai paper. His elder brother Yuzhi founded a publishing house that produced collections of Lu Xun, one of modern China's leading writers and a family friend, as well as Chinese translations of Edgar Snow and John Steinbeck.

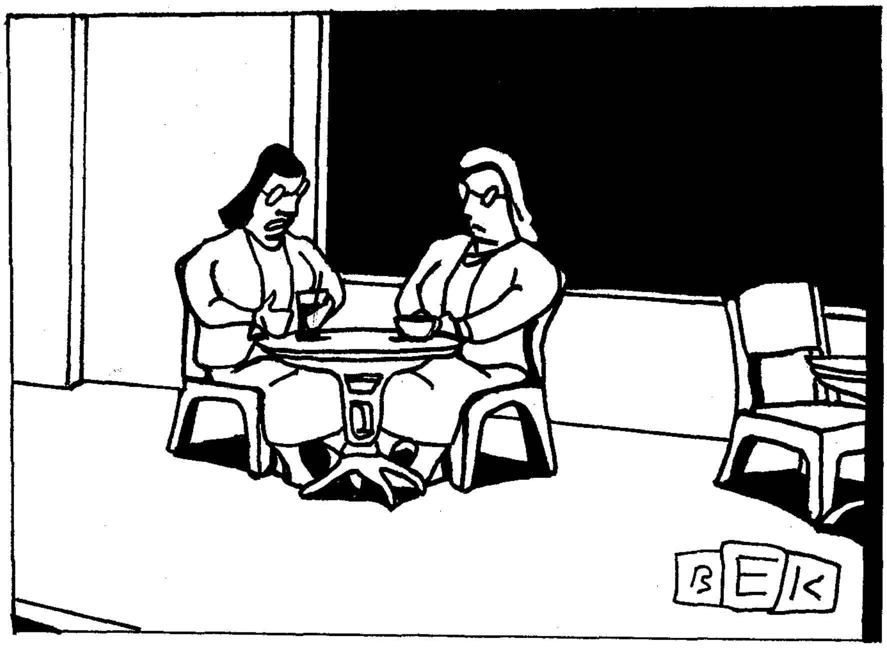
Hu's mother, Hu Lingsheng, was a senior editor at *Workers' Daily* in Beijing. Her father, Cao Qifeng, studied English at a missionary school before becoming an impassioned underground Communist and taking a mid-level post in a trade union. They named their younger daughter Shula, for a Soviet war martyr. In the nineteen-seventies, she changed her name to Shuli, a more popular name for women.

Hu has an acute understanding of China's fickle regard for intellectuals. Her great-uncle Yuzhi was a deputy minister of culture before the Cultural Revolution. "But we were told never to say that to others," Hu told me. Her forthrightness at times worried her parents. "I was not very disciplined. I always spoke about what I was thinking." She attended Beijing's élite 101 Middle School, which had once educated many offspring of Party cadres. Students had privileged access to a smattering of banned foreign literature, including translated volumes of Kerouac, Salinger, and Solzhenitsyn, printed in limited batches for Party élites. Hu would also take books from her family and hide them under her pillow until she could swap them with friends.

The Cultural Revolution engulfed China when Hu was thirteen, and her classes were suspended. As a prominent editor, Hu's mother was criticized at her newspaper and placed under house arrest. Her father was shunted into a backroom job. Like others her age, Hu became a Red Guard and travelled around the country. As the movement descended into violence, she sought refuge in books, trying to maintain a semblance of an education. "It was a very confusing time, because we lost all values," she said. A month before her sixteenth birthday, she was sent to the countryside to experience the rural revolution.

"It was ridiculous," she said of what she found. Farmers had lost any incentive to work. "They just wanted to stay lying in the field, sometimes for two hours. I said, 'Should we start work?' They said, 'How can you think that?' " She went on, "Ten years later, I realized everything was wrong." Hu's sister, Cao Zuyoa, who was in a nearby village, later wrote a book, "Out of the Crucible," about how the rustication campaign forever changed members of their generation. It "buried their Communist utopian dream," she wrote.

After two years, Hu joined the Army—which led, several years later, to membership in the Communist Party—and she was assigned to a remote hospital in a rural northern area of Jiangsu Province, where she spent the next eight years. She worked in the dining room, fed pigs,



"Everyone's a bottomless pit of something."

helped on the wards, and ran a tiny broadcast booth that played music and announcements. When colleges resumed classes, in 1978, Hu secured a coveted seat at People's University in Beijing. The journalism department was not her first choice, but it was the best that the school offered. She was a conspicuous figure on campus: the department's only freshman girl in a military uniform. "There was not a person in our class who didn't know who she was," Miao Di, a history major from a Beijing military family who met Hu in an English class, said. He, too, had been sent to the countryside, and they shared a sense of disaffection. They married in 1982.

After college, Hu joined *Workers' Daily*, and, in 1985, after some early investigative projects, she was assigned to a bureau in the southeastern coastal city of Xiamen. The area had been designated as a laboratory for the growth of a free market. There she developed her skill for networking, meeting everyone in city hall—including the mayor, with whom she played bridge. Among those she interviewed was a promising young cadre who was the city's vice-mayor: Xi Jinping, the son of a Politburo member. Xi was a Party loyalist with pro-market sensibilities, whose building of a successful theme park had earned him the nickname the God of Wealth. Today, Xi is China's Vice-President and is regarded as the heir apparent to the President.

In 1987, Hu won a fellowship from the Minnesota-based World Press Institute to spend five months in America. The experience was a revelation. "I spent the whole night reading the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*" and marvelling at the size of it, she said. (*Workers' Daily*, at the time, was four pages.) She met investigative reporters at the Philadelphia *Inquirer* and interned at *USA Today*. She returned to China, and in the spring of 1989 the Tiananmen Square movement energized the Beijing press. For weeks, papers revelled in a holiday from censorship. Many journalists, including Hu, joined the demonstrations. As soldiers cracked down on the night of June 3rd, Hu recalls, "I went to the street, then went back to the office and said, 'We should cover this.' " But the decision had already come down: "The newspaper decided we weren't going to publish a word about it." Her involvement was costly. Many reporters who had spoken out were fired or banished to the provinces. Miao Di thought that Hu might get arrested, but, in the end, she was suspended for eighteen months.

She used the time to write "Behind the Scenes at American Newspapers," the first Chinese book to examine the relationship between the American press and democracy, with descriptions of Watergate and the Pentagon Papers. It was a must-read among Chinese news workers, and in it she posed a challenge: Who among them "could take the initiative and do something akin to what American news organizations have done?"

In 1998, Hu received a phone call from Wang Boming, one of the hotel-room founders of the Stock Exchange Executive Council; he was starting a magazine and he wanted her to run it. She had two conditions: Wang would never interfere in her newsroom, and he would give her a budget of two million yuan—about a quarter of a million dollars—to pay for serious reporting trips and salaries that were high enough to prevent reporters from taking bribes. Wang agreed. It was no charity: he and his reform-minded allies in the government saw the magazine as an extension of their determination to modernize the economy.

"You need the media to play its function to disclose the facts to the public, and, in a sense, help the government detect evils," Wang told me recently, in his large, cluttered office downstairs from *Caijing's* headquarters. He is a classic type of the generation that received an American education and returned to China—a chain-smoker with a thick brush of gray-flecked black hair, Ferragamo eyeglasses, and a bilingual sense of humor. When he talks about Hu, a weary look crosses his face that suggests he has got more than he bargained for. "We didn't know that this level of risk would come along with it," he said. But Wang also betrays a keen sense of Hu's significance to China. "When I was studying in the States, I needed to make some money to pay my tuition, so I was working for a newspaper in Chinatown—the *China Daily News*," he said. As a cub reporter, he relished the chance to follow a trail wherever it led. He had felt like "a king without a crown."

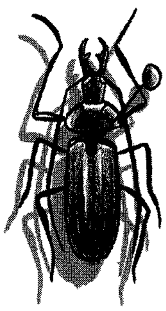
Caijing established its tone right away. Its inaugural issue, in April, 1998, featured an explosive cover story detailing the case of Qiong Min Yuan, a real-estate company whose share price had quadrupled before it was charged with overstating profits. *Caijing* revealed that, while legions of small-time investors lost millions, insiders had been tipped off in advance and unloaded their shares. Regulators were incensed; they accused *Caijing* of flouting press restrictions, and Wang's executives had to troop to the regulators' office to make self-criticisms.

Each story refined Hu's calculation of how far she could push. In 2001, a twenty-five-year-old *Caijing* reporter, thumbing through customs records, discovered that Yinguangxia Holdings, one of China's largest listed companies, had posted online a falsified claim of eighty-seven million dollars in profits. The political stakes were high, because a parade of top leaders had already visited the company to praise it. Wang Boming was so worried that *Caijing* would be shut down if it went with the story that he did something he said he has never done again: he called a high-ranking Communist Party official for approval before publishing. "He said, 'Is that story really true or is there any doubt?' " Wang recalled. "I said, 'The story is definitely true, but there is political implication there.' He said, 'If it's true, then go ahead.' " Hours after the story appeared, the company's stock was suspended from trading; eventually, its executives went to jail.

The defining moment in *Caijing's* emergence, however, came two years later, when the reporter Cao Haili, arriving in Hong Kong, noticed that every person on the train platform seemed to be wearing a surgical mask. What the hell is that about? she thought, and alerted Hu. The Chinese press had been running reports of a mysterious new virus, but health officials had promised the public that it was contained. Newspaper editors in Guangdong Province had been privately instructed to publish reassuring stories about the virus, and some were even told what typeface to use, one editor at the time recalled. But these restrictions did not extend to editors outside Guangdong. "I bought a lot of books about breathing diseases, infections, and viruses," Hu said, and her staff began to find errors in the government's statements. Meanwhile, *Caijing* editors tracked the Web site of the World Health Organization, which tallied a steadily growing number of SARS cases in China, even as the government continued to deny it. The tone of the coverge was serious and questioning without actually accusing the government of lying.

Over the course of a month, *Caijing* produced a series of weekly supplements on SARS in addition to its regular issues. In the end, the magazine brushed up against the limit. "*Caijing* was planning another issue that was going to look back on the lessons of SARS," David Bandurski, a researcher at the University of Hong Kong's China Media Project, said. "And the government essentially sent the message 'No—this is not going to happen. This stops now.' "

Hu has cultivated her sense for the precise moment when a sensitive subject is safe to publicize. "You can feel her making adjustments," Wang Feng, a former *Caijing* editor, told me. "For example, at Monday's editorial conference she might aim at something, and the editors and reporters go ahead and do it. And by Wednesday's editorial conference she will say, 'You know what? I've got more information on this and we should not say that. Maybe we should aim lower.' " In political-corruption cases—which are acutely sensitive—*Caijing's* investigative reporters often collect information for weeks or months while they wait for an opening. In many cases, once Xinhua makes a brief announcement of an official being arrested, *Caijing* is ready to publish a full story. When, on June 8th, Xinhua issued a one-sentence report saying that the mayor of Shenzhen had been detained in a corruption probe, *Caijing* posted an in-depth piece twenty-nine minutes later.



After SARS, *Caijing* never entirely retreated to the confines of business journalism, though today it benefits from the perception that it is simply policing the economy. As *Caijing's* scoops mounted, banking regulators began calling reporters, looking for tips, instead of the other way around. Even more satisfying, Western media had no choice but to follow and credit *Caijing's* leads. At a certain point, the magazine's success and bravado had become self-reinforcing: it had gone so far already that conservative branches of the government could no longer be sure which other officials supported it.

And then *Caijing* had its first lesson in what happens when it goes too far. In January, 2007, its cover story "Whose Luneng?" described how a group of investors had paid a pittance for control of a giant conglomerate, with assets ranging from power plants to a sports club. The conglomerate, Luneng, was valued at more than ten billion dollars, but a pair of little-known private companies had paid just under five hundred and fifty million dollars for ninety-two per cent of the company, *Caijing* reported. State regulators had received no notification of the sale—which was ordinarily a legal requirement—and a tangle of overlapping boards and shareholders seemed designed to obscure the identity of the new owners and where their money originated. Nearly half of the purchasing capital came from an untraceable source, *Caijing* discovered.

After *Caijing* attempted to publish a brief followup, authorities ordered the story removed from the Web site and the newsstands. The staff in *Caijing's* Shanghai office are said to have torn up issues by hand. "Everybody felt humiliated," a former editor said.

Since then, *Caijing* has referred occasionally to its Luneng investigation, but Hu is not eager to discuss the case; she considers that run-in with the government the magazine's "largest disaster." A person who is involved with *Caijing* and is familiar with the story said that revealing the attempt to profit wildly from the privatization deal had come too close to implicating the children of senior Party leaders—a taboo that trumps even reformists' desire for a more open press.

In 2007, the Nieman Foundation, at Harvard, gave Hu an award for "conscience and integrity." The award was well deserved, but it placed her in slightly awkward company: previous winners included a publisher in Iran who was repeatedly summoned to court for her magazine's reporting and an editor in Zimbabwe who had been arrested and tortured by the military.

Hu does not live the marginalized life of a samizdat editor or sign dissidents' communiqués. For all her skepticism and intensity, her writing is notably short on outrage. When she criticizes, either in her column or in her editing choices, she uses the language of loyal opposition. Following the conviction of a high-level official in a pension-fund scandal that erupted in 2006, she didn't challenge the moral peril of one-party government but argued that China's weak asset-disclosure laws let officials' relatives and colleagues profit. In a column from 2007 entitled "Yearning for Reform," she declared that "the public's top concern is the rampant corruption and an imbalanced power system." She went on, "Some argue that pushing forward with political reform will be destabilizing. Yet, in fact, maintaining the status quo without any reform creates a hotbed for social turbulence." In other words, political reform is the way to consolidate power, not lose it.

In her office one afternoon in June, shortly after the anniversary of the Sichuan earthquake, I asked Hu why she thought that other publications had been punished for covering the collapsed schools, while *Caijing* had not. "We never say a word in a very emotional or casual way, like 'You lied,' " she said. "We try to analyze the system and say *why* a good idea or a good wish cannot become reality."

If a Chinese paper dwells on the names of specific officials who allowed the construction of unsafe schools, it might be scoring a point for accountability, but the investigative coup also leaves the paper vulnerable to petty political retribution. Hu said, "We try not to give any excuses to the cadres who don't want to get criticized." Ultimately, she said, the important question is not "which person didn't use good-quality bricks fifteen years ago" but something deeper. "We need further reform," she said. "We need checks and balances. We need transparency. We say it this way. No simple words. No slogans."

That approach appeals to reformers in the government who might genuinely want to solve problems but don't want to give up power to do so. Some Chi-

INTRODUCING ED, THE NEPHEW OF GOD
No, I don't have any "special powers."
Yeah, I'm His cousin.
But I can make a good margarita, and I'm a nice person. Isn't that enough?
R. Chast

nese journalists say that Hu's greatest skill is playing interest groups against one another, whether by amplifying the central government's effort to round up corrupt mayors or by letting one wing of the government thwart a rival wing's agenda. Allow the most powerful group to endure, the theory goes, and you can do real—even profitable—journalism. The danger, however, is that, as *Caijing's* profile and financial stakes grow, the magazine can afford to take fewer risks. A reader recently posted a comment on the Web site saying, "*Caijing* has become increasingly mainstream. . . . The flavor of critical thinking is gone, replaced by things designed to appeal to the interests of readers and subscribers, but lacking soul."

Caijing has proved to be attentive to the Chinese government's views on what is unmistakably off-limits. As ethnic violence erupted in the Xinjiang capital of Urumqi last week, the magazine sent two reporters, whose spot-news coverage described the violence and damage but, in their early reporting, did not venture into examining underlying causes of the unrest. Likewise, in the fifteen months since an uprising in Tibet had exposed a well of explosive discontent facing Chinese authorities in some of the nation's ethnic regions, *Caijing* had largely steered clear of the story.

I had lunch not long ago with Cheng Yizhong, a former editor-in-chief of the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, one of China's liveliest papers. He became famous in China for publishing an investigation into the death, in 2003, of Sun Zhigang, a young graphic designer who died in police custody after a beating. Sun, reporters discovered, had been transferred to a *shourong*, or "custody and repatriation" station. Ostensibly designed to process vagrants and runaways, the *shourong* system was widely resented; it gave police the right to ask people on the street for identification and residency papers and to detain them, with little cause. Those who were unable to pay fees could earn their release by working at prison-run farms and factories. Sun, it was later discovered, had been stopped on the street by police who detained him even though he insisted that his papers were in order. The newspaper's report had triggered a wave of public outrage over the *shourong* system. Followup articles that ran in the *Southern Metropolis Daily* and other newspapers revealed that the system was profitable for local police and had spawned a nationwide network of seven hundred detention camps; in at least one area, it was reported, stations bought inmates in order to maximize revenues. In August, 2003, the scandal prompted the central government to abolish the system, an astonishing case of the Chinese press influencing national policy. But within a year Cheng had been detained, and two of his colleagues arrested on charges of illegally distributing bonuses awarded by the editorial board. The charges were widely considered as retribution for the newspaper's reporting on the Sun case and also for its previous coverage of the SARS virus. Cheng spent five months in a detention center and now works in a low-profile media job. His two colleagues were sentenced to long jail terms.

I asked Cheng why he and Hu had fared so differently. *Caijing*, he said, had achieved a stature that put it out of reach of lower-ranking bureaucrats. But he also drew a distinction between his campaign for radically curtailing police powers and *Caijing's* focus on raising government performance. "*Caijing's* topics haven't affected the fundamental ruling system, so it is relatively safe," he said, adding, "I am not criticizing Hu Shuli, but in some ways *Caijing* is just serving a more powerful or relatively better interest group."

Unsurprisingly, Hu sees it slightly differently: "We don't think about one group or another—we think about the whole system and whatever can achieve reform."

The strategy of acknowledging the authority of the system and then fighting prudently to improve it defines *Caijing's* brilliance and its limitations. Qian Gang, the former editor, told me, "A flood is ferocious, but it solves no problems. In Chinese, we say that you can bore a hole in a stone by the steady dripping of water."

Hu prefers a noisier metaphor. *Caijing* is a woodpecker, she says, forever hammering at a tree, trying not to knock it down but to make it grow straighter. ♦

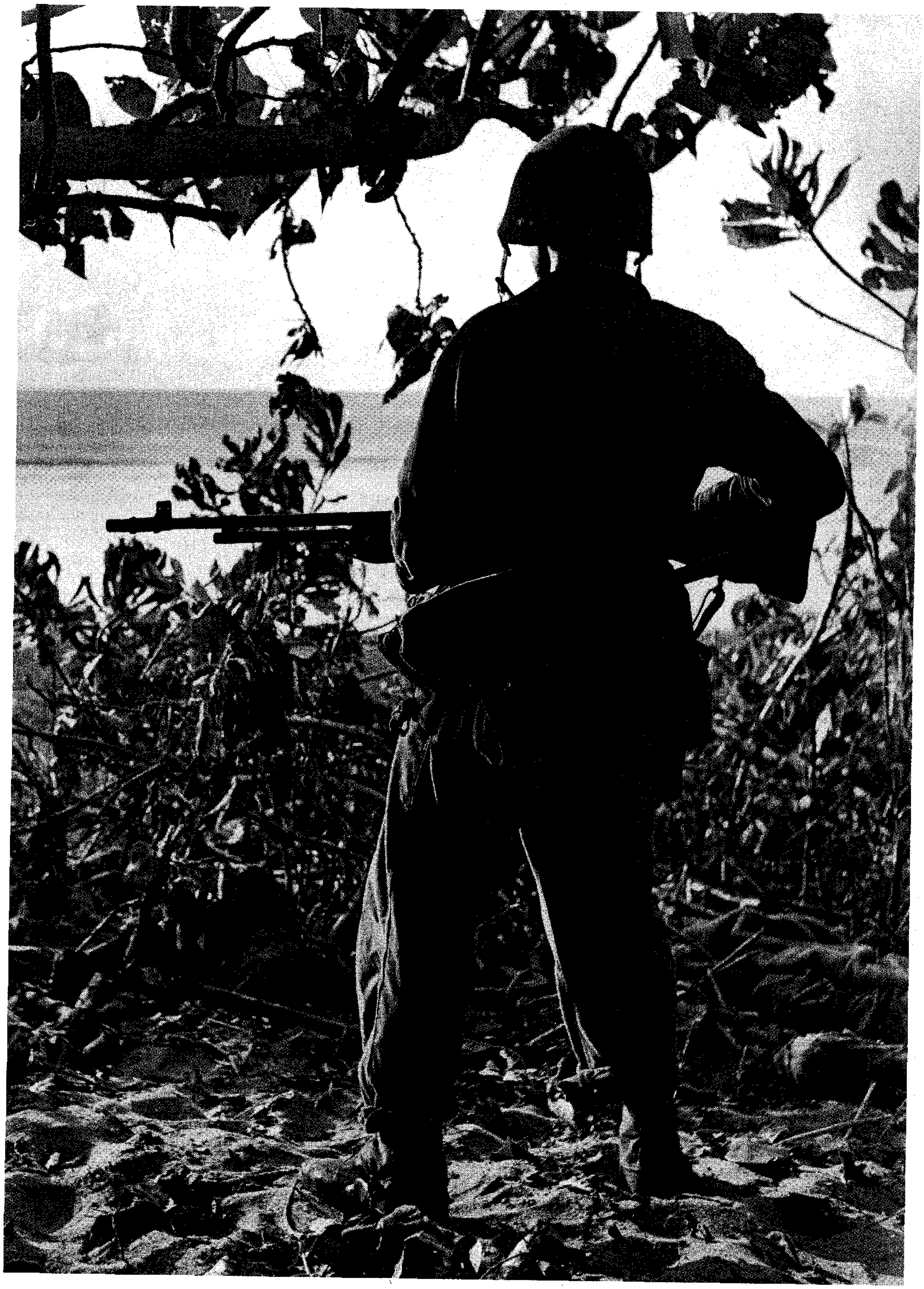
NEWYORKER.COM

Letter from China, Evan Osnos's blog.

FICTION

RAT BEACH

BY WILLIAM STYRON



When I was seventeen, bravado, mingled with what must have been a death wish, made me enlist in the officer-training program of the Marine Corps. Since those in my age group were considerably too callow to lead troops into battle, it was decided at the Navy Department that we would be sent to college, where, as book-toting privates, we would gain a little learning and seasoning, and also a year or two of physical and mental growth, before our fateful collision with the Japs. My classmates and I, being the youngest of the young, remained uniformed college students for the longest period, while those who were only a year or so older went off for officer training and preceded us into those terrifying island battles which marked the last stages of the Pacific war. No group among all the services had as high a casualty rate as Marine Corps second lieutenants. This is firmly on the record. A harrowing book by an enlisted combat veteran, E. B. Sledge, called "With the Old Breed," described the situation concisely: "During the course of the long fighting on Okinawa . . . we got numerous replacement lieutenants. They were wounded or killed with such regularity that we rarely knew anything about them . . . and saw them on their feet only once or twice. . . . Our officers got hit so soon and so often that it seemed to me the position of second lieutenant in a rifle company had been made obsolete by modern warfare."

Thus, had I been older by only a year or so I would have been immersed in Iwo Jima's bloodbath; a mere six months and I would have been one of Sledge's Okinawa martyrs, obliterated in the deadliest land engagement of the Pacific war. I escaped this horror by a hair. During the landing in April, my division was employed in a diversionary operation—a feint—off the southeast coast of the island. Our presence was intended to draw the Japs off balance while our two other divisions went ashore (unopposed, as it turned out) on the western beaches. Then we steamed back to the safety, the calm, the virtual Stateside coziness of the island of Saipan, where we began to prepare for the invasion of Japan, and where I had ample time to reflect on both what I'd barely missed on Okinawa and Iwo Jima and what I was likely to encounter when I helped storm the fortress beaches of the mainland. Here my desperate internal conflict began to brew. For while the warrior in me—the self-consciously ballsy kid who'd joined the Marines for the glamour and the danger—lamented not having seen action, there was another, more sensible part of myself that felt immense relief at this reprieve. And reprieve it was. For all of us knew that the invasion of Japan was in the offing, and that we'd be involved in no more feints or diversions. We'd be in the vanguard. For the first time, I was terribly afraid. The killing grounds of the recent past were for me a foretaste of things to come, and the sorry fate of all those scared but uncomplaining guys we'd said goodbye to seemed to foreshadow my own.

I was so fucking scared, there on Saipan. The beach was still littered with the jagged metal junk from the American assault the previous summer, although you could always, with caution, pussyfooting among the rocks and debris, find a decent enough spot for swimming. The tents of our company bivouac were laid out alongside a dusty road that the Seabees had bulldozed through the coral after the Marine and Army troops had wrested the island from the Japs, months before we replacements arrived. A thousand miles northwest lay Okinawa, and the wounded from that battle were being transferred from huge floating infirmaries with names like Comfort and Mercy to the naval hospital not far down the coast from our encampment. Along the road, night and day, a stream of ambulances came with their freight: the gravely hurt, the paralyzed, the amputees, the head-trauma cases, and the other wreckage from what had turned out to be a mammoth land battle.

In the evenings, we'd spend our last weary moments—our respite from the hours of combat training—lolling around in our tents and watching with morbid fixation the parade of ambulances; our eyes tracked these dust-caked vans through a thick haze of cigarette smoke that rose and fell in bluish undulations. My "Pocket Book of Verse," which I'd lugged around in my seabag all through my Marine Corps career—from the V-12 unit at Duke and boot camp at Parris Island to Hawaii and, finally, Saipan—was bulging and close to decomposition in the humid air, but on those nights I'd lie on my cot and read again from A. E. Housman and Swinburne and Omar Khayyám or some other moony fatalist or master of Weltschmerz, while the tropical dusk grew murky blue and Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" or a Tommy Dorsey tune sounded faintly from a portable record-player or radio, drawing forth from my breast a spasm of hopeless, cloying homesickness.

Then I'd get distracted by the ambulances. The cavalcade was hypnotic to watch and just as harrowing. There was a particular hummock of coral that caused the green vans to slow to a crawl, gears clashing as they shifted down. At first, these passages over the coral were uneventful, but the big bump became more ragged as it wore away, and I couldn't shake the memory of one ambulance that stalled, then jerked back and forth, jostling its poor passenger until the voice from within screamed "Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus!" again and again. Poetry was no remedy for such a sound, and so I'd close the book and lie there in a trance, trying to shut out all thought of past or future, and focus on the tent's plywood deck, where there was usually at least one huge brown snail, with a shell the size of a Ping-Pong ball, propelling itself laboriously forward and trailing a wake of mucilaginous slime with the hue and consistency of semen. Giant African snails, they were called, and they slid all over the island, numberless, like a second landing force; they woke us up at night and we actually heard them sibilantly dragging their tracks across the flooring and colliding, with a tiny report like the cracking open of walnuts.

The fucking snails were always getting squashed beneath our field boots, making a tiny mess that reminded me of the fragility of my own corporeal being. It didn't take long for the instruments of modern warfare to turn a human body into just such a repulsive emulsion. Would I be reduced to an escargot's viscous glob? One of the riflemen in my platoon, a big muscular farm boy from South Dakota, had seen, strewn on the Tarawa beachhead, a string of guts twelve feet long belonging to the marine who, only seconds before the mortar blast, had been his best buddy. Nearly all the combat vets had endured such grisly traumas. During the previous year's landing on Saipan, my new platoon sergeant, a onetime trapeze artist from the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, had survived (with only a cut lip and a lingering deafness) the explosion of a Jap knee-mortar shell that had vapor-

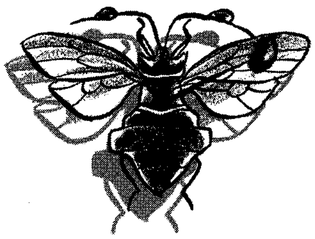
W. EUGENE SMITH/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY

ized the two other occupants of his foxhole. Would I avoid the worst, like these guys, or would I, when I finally stumbled ashore on the Japanese mainland, be immolated in one foul form or another, consumed by fire or rent apart by steel or crushed like a snail?

Such thoughts were torment. As I lay on my cot, "The Pocket Book of Verse" would slip from my hand, and fear—vile, cold fear—would steal through my flesh like some puzzling sickness. I actually felt my extremities grow numb, as if the blood had drained from my toes and fingers, and the sensation caused me both alarm and shame. Did my tentmates, Stiles and Veneris, the two platoon leaders whose cots lay so closely jammed against mine, feel the same terror? Did their bowels loosen like mine at the mere thought of the coming invasion? I knew that they were scared. We joked, God how we joked—we joked all the time about our future trial—but this was a form of wisecracking, smart-ass bravado, cheap banter. I could never know the depths of their fear; it was a region I dared not explore. In our smothering proximity, we shared everything else—snores and farts and bad breath and odorous feet. Even the clumsy stealth of jerking off was a matter for shared joking—the unsuppressed moan, the vibrating sheet glimpsed in the dawn light. *Beatin' your meat again, Veneris!* But somehow I knew that we could never share real fear. Was theirs as nearly unbearable as mine, this dread that wrapped me in a blanket woven of many clammy hands? Or was their mastery over their fear simple bravery—something I could never possess?

Often, I thought it was creepy to feel this fear in such a seductive place. Saipan was like a bowl of tropical Jell-O. Even in the muggy rainy season there were glowing days that made me mourn the recent fate of this lush Technicolor landscape, shattered by bullets and trampled by so many boots and fires and tank treads. Most of the islands that marines had fought over and secured had been jungle horrors, infested by disease and rot, or sun-scorched coral outcroppings, useless as real estate and, in strategic terms, scarcely worth conquering, much less destroying thousands of American lives to capture. But Saipan was actually—I couldn't resist the word—lovable, or would have been under peacetime conditions, with a jungle of hibiscus and flame trees and bougainvillea exuding an urgent exotic odor that was dispersed on balmy breezes and that conjured up visions (whenever I allowed myself to think that the war might end) of Pan American Clippers bearing their cargoes of hot honeymooners panting to get laid or otherwise disport themselves in swank palm-thatched huts on the very beach where our company bivouac was set up. Jesus, I thought, they'd probably even be getting sex that was air-conditioned. As I lay in the tent some mornings, at dawn, the flowered air was like the sweetest aphrodisiac, and I'd get tremendously stirred up with lewd fantasies that for a single moment, arresting me in rapture, would wipe out my fear. It lasted the merest instant, but it helped. Only a self-induced sexual climax had the capacity to obliterate the future, and the unspeakable dread of it that dwelled in my heart.

As July wore on, the daily procession of ambulances dwindled to one or two every few hours, then ceased altogether—a sign that the Okinawa battle was now history. But an ambulance was not the only memento mori, and there were other auguries capable of scaring us shitless. The word came down through dispatches on the Armed Forces Radio, and spread rapidly through the encampment, that on the Japanese mainland the civilian population had gone berserk; people were arming themselves to the teeth—old men, women, and hysterical kids. The Jap defeat on Okinawa, far from crushing the national spirit, had aroused the citizens to a new resolve, and they'd be waiting for us with every primitive weapon they could lay their hands on. On a bright morning, after hearing this freakish news, I had one of those strangling nightmares from which one awakes with heartbeat amok. The dream had had a jerky clarity, like a newsreel clip. In some Osaka suburb, I was leading my platoon through clouds of smoke as we roamed about in house-to-house fighting. All of a sudden, there rushed at me a murderous little woman in a kimono, with one of those ivory doodads in her hair; screaming banzais and on the point of harpooning me squarely through the gut with a bamboo stick, she metamorphosed into a nattering wee manicurist busily attending to my nails.



One evening, startling news circulated: all the officers in the division were being ordered to assemble in the huge amphitheatre at the far end of the beach. Such a muster of officers had never happened before. Almost at once, the rumor flew that we were gathering to learn about the invasion, though precisely what no one could even guess.

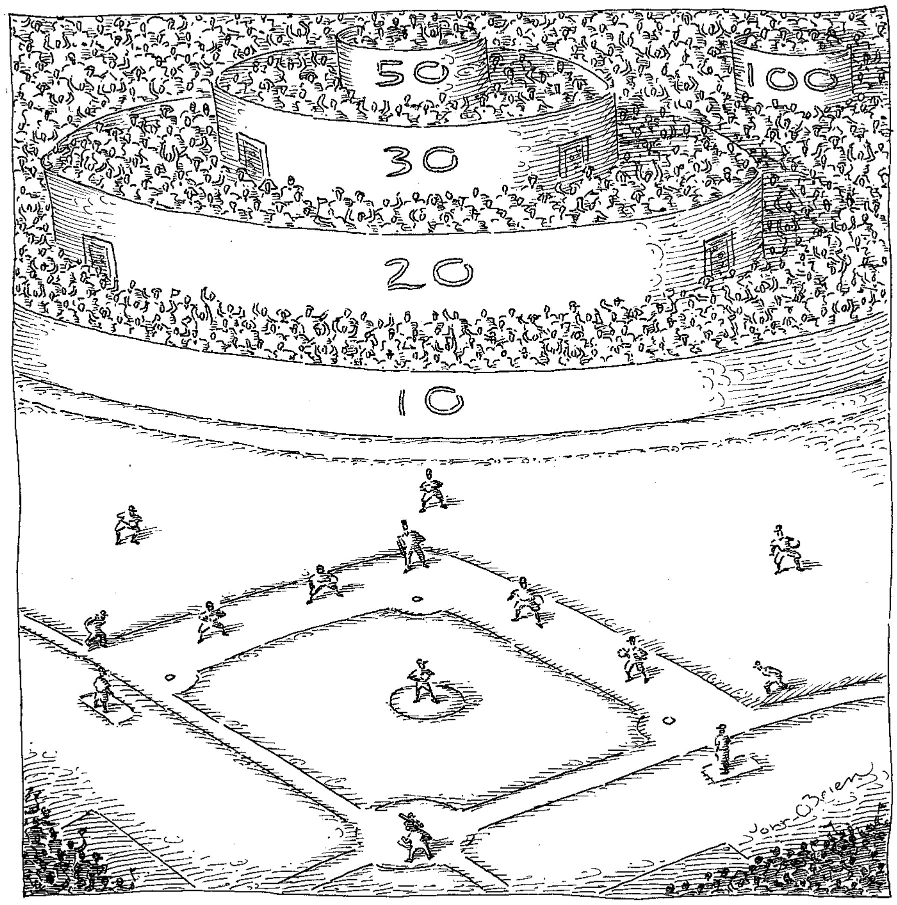
Just after chow in the mess tent, at around six o'clock, I walked with Stiles and Veneris down a path through a scrubby pandanus-pine grove bordering the lagoon beach and onto the beach itself, a stretch of clean powdery sand. I'd been there many times before and thus was familiar with the droll monstrosity on a giant poster that an engineer outfit had stuck up on a stanchion—a creation executed by some marine who had been a cartoonist in civilian life. It was a bespectacled squinty-eyed Jap soldier portrayed as a dementedly grinning rat. "Know Your Enemy" was the legend beneath the profoundly repulsive effigy, complete with shitty-looking cap, buckteeth, whiskers, pink watery eyes, a coiling pink tail, and—drawn with such subtlety that one didn't immediately notice it—an elongated pink cock gripped in a hairy paw. It was this last detail, usually eliciting a slow double take, that got at everyone's funny bone, especially the old-timers who'd been through the meat grinders on Guadalcanal and Tarawa and here on Saipan, and whose hatred for the Japs was like an ongoing lust. In keeping with the Marine Corps's habit of uglifying, whenever possible, the names of the natural splendors it encroached upon, the poster had caused this portion of the shoreline to be called Rat Beach, and as we trudged along its edge, mostly silent, I think all of us felt the same desperate unease, aware that we were doubtless being prepared to receive momentous tidings.

Finally, Stiles spoke up. "Jesus, I hope this is it. We wait around any longer, we'll go nuts."

Veneris put in, "Maybe they're going

to give us a landing date. I hope the fuck it's soon."

Oh, Jesus, I thought, I hope the fuck it's never. I couldn't even work up a falsely brave remark, and I felt twisted with envy at the others' breezy offhandedness. That wasn't all that I envied about Stiles and Veneris, both of them blandly efficient athletic mesomorphs who could do with maddening grace what I could do only with dogged effort: strip down a weapon, set up a mortar emplacement, follow a compass heading on a night march, quickly find fields of fire for a machine gun, carry out a snappy rifle inspection, and even keep their dungarees looking crisp and clean. I wasn't a bad platoon leader; in fact, I was pretty good. I was certainly not a fuckup—I was too desperate to avoid failure and disgrace for that—but on certain petty military challenges, duck soup for most lieutenants, I often barely squeaked by. I was happy to be just average. I was happy, too, that I got along so well with these guys. I'd been boringly and single-mindedly an aesthete in college, a devotee of quality lit and chamber music, with tendencies that might have been called "neurasthenic." My tentmates had both been standout jocks and were also gorgeous: the blond Stiles on a champion swimming team at Yale; the Greek Veneris, with skin like dark enamel, an all-Big Ten tackle at Ohio State. Such looks and pedigrees gave them a leg up with the kids in their platoons, while I, skinny and knobby-kneed, almost didn't dare to let my troops see me reading anything so sissified as "The Pocket Book of Verse."

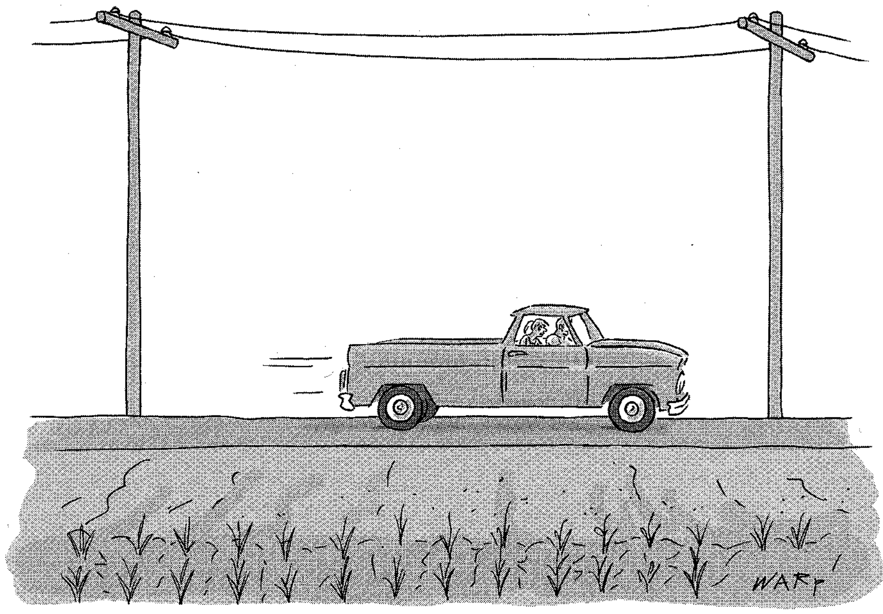


The amphitheatre, a natural coral bowl surrounded by palm trees, was already partly filled with the hundreds of officers and warrant officers of every rank in our division. This vast space served the needs of the Army and Navy personnel on the island as well as the marines. The week before, Bob Hope had entertained the troops from the stage, and the week before that we'd sat through an evening of Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge, featuring among other warblers Ish Kabibble and Wee Bonnie Baker, whose infantile voice in a song called "Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny, Oh!" was one of many dim-witted numbers that had held me captive during my pubescence. If two hours of Kay Kyser had been an ordeal, the same could not be said for Bob Hope; he'd been extravagantly, bigheartedly funny and had brought along a troupe of showgirls, beautiful long-legged creatures in feathers and G-strings, who displayed a stupefying amount of bare flesh as they wiggled their butts down toward the screaming mob. It had added another surreal dimension to this ghoulish Pacific war: the bimbos debarking from gargantuan transport planes, flashing their teeth and gyrating their groins, then becoming almost instantly airborne again, leaving behind thousands of doomed devils with aching gonads.

We waited and fidgeted, minding our behavior. Officers were supposed to exhibit decorum, so we spoke in low voices. When enlisted men had to wait for long, they usually became a little raucous and horsed around, grab-assing—it was one of their privileges. I thought I'd managed to dominate my fear, but I was wrong. The despondent mood I'd been trying to ward off all day overtook me as we sat on the hard benches. I was seized by a sombre unfocussed anxiety; I tried to make it disappear, but there was no way I could beat back the waves of panic. I kept talking to myself, falling into a little monologue: *Just stay calm, relax, everything's going to be all right.*

Suddenly, I saw our battalion commander, Colonel Timothy Halloran (Happy was his nickname), take a seat on a nearby bench, and the mere reality of his presence soothed me a bit, as often happened when he hove into sight. We young officers were all nuts about Happy Halloran, who had a carefully cultivated, corny Irish brogue, a waxed handlebar mustache, a Navy Cross he'd won at the terrible shambles of Tarawa (where, badly wounded, he'd led an assault on a Jap pillbox, killing a slew of the enemy with their own machine gun), and, above all, an intuitive sense of leadership that allowed him to wield strict authority without losing the common touch. Unlike the other services, the Marine Corps has always harbored flamboyant characters and nonconformists, and we loved Happy Halloran for his slightly wacky heterodoxy, always playfully challenging the System.

When at last, long after nightfall, the glittering bright lights went up on the stage, the presentation commenced, and a parade of high-ranking Fleet Marine Force officers—big shots from Hawaii—



"I'd better get a hit country song out of growing up this way."

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embarked on their speeches, we began to realize a cold fact: they had nothing new to tell us. "Security" and "secrecy" were the watchwords. The assault date was set, one intelligence colonel announced, but for security reasons it could not be revealed. Another officer took the stage. The site of the invasion of Japan had been selected, he proclaimed, and the beaches were now being carefully evaluated for all pertinent factors bearing upon the successful amphibious landing, but secrecy prevented an announcement of their location. "Then why the fuck are we sitting here?" I heard Happy Halloran mutter. I could see the back of his neck redden; he was stewing. A couple of officers near him snickered.

Drops of rain spattered our brows. The palm trees thrashed in the rising wind. Still another officer from Pearl Harbor, a brigadier general, spoke from the podium; his gravelly voice boomed over the loudspeakers. "Gentlemen, we are faced with a difficult paradox. It would be reassuring if, after the destruction wrought upon the Japanese Army at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, it could be reported that the morale of their troops had been shattered, and their resources undermined, making the coming invasion easier on us. But the plain truth is—and our intelligence reports are clear on this matter—the Jap forces are, more than ever before, prepared to die for the Emperor, to fight to the last man." He droned on. "More fucking blather," I heard Colonel Halloran say. "Everybody knows the fucking Jap cocksuckers are a bunch of suicidal apes."

Even the star of the evening, an admiral, had nothing new to say, or, rather, what he did have to say was, we all sensed, ripe hokum. He appeared under the brilliant klieg lights, the first admiral most of us junior officers had ever laid eyes on. His name was Crews. Dressed in khaki, silver stars glittering on his open collar, chewing on a meerschaum pipe, he ambled to the center of the stage with a sheaf of notes clutched in his hand. He was angular and professorial-looking, and he peered at us owlishly through steel-rimmed glasses with lenses that grotesquely magnified his eyes. Plainly he was a desk admiral whose seagoing days were far in the past, and plainly, too, his propaganda mission was to bring us tidings of hope and cheer. Happy Halloran gave a jolly cackle and pounded his fist in his hand as he identified the lecturer, whom he'd encountered before. "I'll be a son of a bitch if it isn't Good News Crews," he said. "The fucking windbag, he's going to feed us the same load of garbage! We had this guy just before Tarawa. He told us he had good news. He said that after the Navy shelled the island it would be a piece of cake. And look what happened!" Halloran needed to say no more. The Tarawa calamity was already a Pacific legend: how naval intelligence, relying on obsolete charts, had miscalculated the tides so flagrantly that the Marine troops in their landing vessels were forced to disembark on coral reefs and then wade ashore for hundreds of yards, exposed to killing fire from Japanese machine guns. Scores of slaughtered men turned the whitecapped waves incarnadine. Small wonder that Happy Halloran detested the Navy and its spokesmen. "Listen to this creep!" he said.

"Gentlemen, it's good news indeed," Admiral Crews announced. "I'm here to describe the manner in which naval forces will support you in your operation against the Japanese homeland. Let me say that our support cannot, of course, supplant in any way the Marines' incomparable mastery of amphibious warfare, yet we are prepared to make your task easier." He spoke for nearly an hour. He said that while the present war had seen invasions that were complex and audacious enterprises—North Africa, Normandy, Tarawa, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, Okinawa—those battles would be dwarfed by the magnitude of the coming event, doubtless the mightiest naval offensive in history. He told of the armada of vessels that would be involved—the battleships, the cruisers, the destroyers, the submarines—and the titanic fleet of aircraft carriers with their hundreds of planes. He dwelled on the thousands of tons of supplies that the cargo ships would deliver to the Japanese shores from depots across the breadth of the Pacific, from California to Hawaii, the Philippines, Espíritu Santo, and the Solomons. But, chiefly, the Admiral extolled the might of naval gunfire, whose concentration on the landing area, he said, gesturing heavenward with his meerschaum, would be the heaviest ever to support American troops. Together with precision attacks from carrier-based planes, the pre-invasion bombardment would pour fire day after day onto the beaches with such intensity—he paused, weighing the phrase, then said, "with such stupendous intensity"—that the very ground upon which the Japanese defenses stood would be obliterated. Furthermore, he added, should the marines be properly apprehensive about underwater obstacles, these would be effectively eliminated well before D Day by teams of Navy frogmen who would clear the beaches. "I cannot believe this dingbat!" I heard Happy Halloran burst out, a little too loud, just before the Admiral wound down his spiel in a monotonous statistical stutter of tonnages, man-hours, payloads, cubic yards.

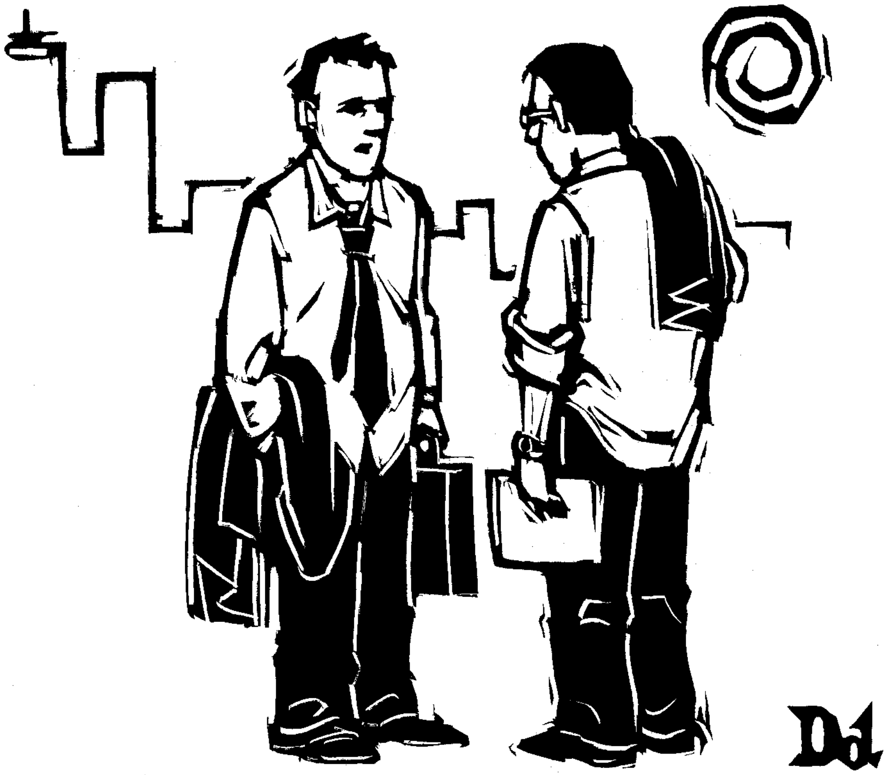
I could sense a tropical downpour in the offing. Greenish lightning flashed across the ocean darkness, and there was a distant grumble of thunder. Halloran had risen from his bench and was clowning around in the shadows, mimicking the Admiral's pipe gestures and delighting the younger officers, who, like me, were as much in awe of his maverick brashness, his contempt for the brainless minutiae and hollow trumpery of military life as they were of his ability to command for himself—when he needed it—absolute respect. Few senior officers had the capacity to give their troops a laugh, and the single feature that made tolerable my vision of D Day, if there was such a feature, was that Happy Halloran would be the one to lead me into the jaws of death.

Now I saw that, having come to the period of questions and answers, the Admiral—who appeared slightly deaf—had cupped a hand around one ear and was attempting to answer a question from Halloran; it was a query delivered across the arena in a voice deliberately pitched a little too low for the Admiral to hear. Beneath his huge handlebar, the Colonel's teeth flashed a malevolent grin. The excremental trope was, I thought, stunning: "Are you aware, sir, that you are full of ostrich shit?"

It was wonderfully deft in its controlled daring: a lieutenant colonel baiting a rear admiral in public was a scary tightrope act, even in a community as notably hostile to Navy brass as the Marines. The impertinence was astounding, courting severe punishment. But somehow Happy Halloran pulled it off; a ripple of laughter rolled through the crowd of officers, then became a sustained roar as the Admiral persisted with a puzzled "What did he say? What did he say?" and the wind squall off the ocean blew stronger, scattering papers and maps and adding its own sudden savage bluster to the general din.

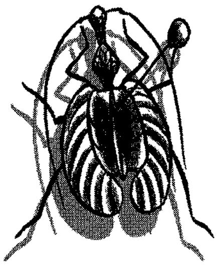
Shortly after this, when the assembly broke up, we found ourselves running. We were running like hell; that is, the battalion officers—eighteen or twenty of us platoon leaders and company commanders and a major named Wilhoite, the battalion exec—were trailing Happy Halloran at full speed down the hard sands of Rat Beach through a rainstorm so dense that the water filled our mouths as we ran and half blinded us. Lightning bolts struck the ocean and the bordering jungle, and we hollered with alarm. We ran like maniacs. We were alone in this weird spree; only our colonel in his dotty genius would have had the gall to lead his officers on such a gallop after a mind-deadening lecture and a sixteen-hour day that had already left us aching with fatigue. But, though we were in misery over what was happening, there was not one of us, gasping for breath and choking on rain, who wasn't somehow secretly proud that the Colonel's inspired whim was testing our endurance to the breaking point. To patiently absorb this extra shred of suffering was one reason we'd joined the Marines. And so, glad masochists all, we fled down the sand in the darkness, following our dungaree-clad leader with his Jerry Colonna mustache and his comically off-pitch baritone that suddenly burst forth with "The Marines' Hymn," which we joined in singing, or tried to, through the heavy pain of our breathing. I recall thinking what a blessed release this was, what a deliverance from the demons of my fear. If I could be caught up in pure motion like this, or if, as sometimes happened to me in the jungle, I could stay focussed on some knotty weapons problem or question of tactics, I'd manage to keep the terror perpetually at bay. Action freed me. It was only in the quiet hours that I felt the lethal dread.

We halted at last and the weather cleared suddenly and beautifully, revealing a blazing full moon. It was like coming out of a stifling tunnel. The Colonel would have run us on and on into the night, I thought, had it not been for a stone cliff jutting out into the sea; here we came up short. Happy Halloran shouted "Fall out!" and we let ourselves sprawl on the sand, all of us silent for long minutes in the moonlight. None of us had canteens, and our thirst was fierce. Despite the rain, we were sweating. The Colonel was as bushed as the rest of us. I saw him squatting at the water's edge, wheezing and cooling his face with handfuls of the surf. After a while he stood up, and when we, too, began to rise to our feet he bade us stay where we were. He said, "Smoking lamp's lit," and most of us groped for cigarette packs and tried to find dry matches in the recesses of our sodden dungarees. Zippo lighters flared in the dark. For minutes no one spoke; we sat there amid the lavender fumes, awaiting what we all sensed would be a declaration. And as we gazed up at Happy Halloran we saw that the comedian's face had been transformed; he looked back at us with rage and sadness. His lips parted to say something, but, before he



"This heat is killing me. Let's get a drink in Little Antarctica."

could speak, we heard a rumble of engines ascending in the air out of the south. It was a squadron of Army Air Force bombers from the airfield on Tinian Island, across the channel, and they cast their furious vibrations down upon us as they gained altitude and made a slow banking turn in their flight toward Japan. This was known as the nightly milk run. We looked up at the planes, as they climbed over the beach, glimpsed their swollen bellies pregnant with bombs that, in some hour of the coming day, would be loosed upon Kobe or Yokohama or Tokyo. The noise was brutal, but the planes rose with synchronous grace and when they flew past the moon, hugely silhouetted there, I was reminded of their witches' errand and the awful multitude of deaths in those paper-and-bamboo cities. But it didn't bother me too much; I had caught the contagion of Jap-hatred and, anyway, I was ready, as the planes vanished northward, to hang on to Happy Halloran's every word.



"Never believe the fucking Navy, lads," the Colonel said. "They will betray you over and over. Before Iwo, the admirals said that that rock would be smashed to smithereens. They said that those sixteen-inch guns would destroy every living thing on the island, even the rats and the ants. But you know who died on D Day and afterward. You know how many thousands of brave marines were destroyed." He began to stroll among us, tapping us gently on our shoulders and keeping up a murmurous flow of talk—talk tinged with a melancholy I'd never heard from him before, yet at the same time sounding a note that was confident, reassuring. His presence struck some hopelessly romantic chord in me, and I couldn't help but think of King Harry and those troubled yeoman soldiers in the aching dark before Agincourt. "I'll be brief," he said. "We're all thirsty and tired and we need to go to sleep. But I've got to tell you something. You guys have helped make this battalion the best one in the division, probably in the whole Marine Corps. Your N.C.O.s are magnificent. You have wonderful men under your command, and when this showdown comes you're going to get the kind of performance every battalion commander dreams about." He paused for a moment, then continued, "But I don't want to give you any shit like that admiral. I want to speak the real truth. What we're facing is the toughest fight in the history of the Marines, and we right here tonight are going to be in the toughest part of that fight. I'm not telling you anything new. Every one of you knows that because we were in floating reserve at Okinawa and only made that decoy landing it puts us No. 1 in line to be the spearhead division for Japan. Furthermore, lads, because this regiment, and especially this battalion, is such a fucking good one, I have almost no doubt that we will be the first to put foot onshore."

I'd more or less been aware of this for weeks, or at least I'd suspected it, like everyone else, but to hear the Colonel verify the fact—in effect, reading out our death warrant—sent my stomach churning; I saw some of the other lieutenants stir in the sand, as if his words had gripped them, too, with their desperate meaning. "Japan's a big stinking fortress now," he went on. "And you know from Okinawa what kind of fanatical fighting they're going to put up to the very end. The miserable bastards are fighters, whatever the fuck else they are—subhuman, I guess. The landing beaches will be as impregnable as any such beaches can be made. They'll have guns zeroed in to blow us apart. But we will have to go in and take that beachhead, even if it means that many of us won't be coming back." The moon cast Happy Halloran's shadow over me, enveloping me in darkness as he drew near, and when I felt his fingertips lightly trace their way across my shoulder it was like a sudden benediction, calming—if only for an instant—my sick disquiet. "I don't have much else to say, lads, except that I think the world of you people." After a pause, he said again, "I really think the world of you. When the time comes, I know you'll do your best—and that's the best the Marine Corps has to offer. Which is the best in the fucking universe. Now let's saddle up and walk home."

For a long time, in the early hours of the morning, I was unable to sleep. I lay on my cot staring up at the dark canopy of the tent, listening to the big spooky moths that every now and then bumped, with a flicker of soft wings, against the mosquito netting. Once in a while, I'd hear another Superfortress rising in the distance from the airfield on Tinian, and far off down the coast there was the faint steady hammering of a pile driver, where the Seabees were building a new pier. *Hang me! Hang me!* spoke the voice of the machine. Close by, a weird bird kept up a disturbance of flirtatious twitters in the jungle; closer still, beneath me, the snails on the plywood made their clumsy crackling. I focussed on their sounds one by one, as if by distracting myself for long enough I might avoid drifting down the tributaries of thought into those swampy visions which would mire me in absolute despair. I could tell from Stiles's and Veneris's breathing that they were deep in slumber, and this threw me into an even more hyped-up wakefulness. Shit, how could they sleep, how could anyone sleep, after the Colonel's evil prophecy?

> By brooks too broad for leaping
> The lightfoot boys are laid;
> The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
> In fields where roses fade.

Under my flashlight's gleam, I pored over the cluster of Housman poems in my "Pocket Book of Verse," letting the sorrow and resignation take hold of my spirit; there was a note both stoical and ill-omened in this pastoral requiem, and it mated perfectly with my enervation, my feeling of doom. I despised myself for being so spineless and disabled, so demoralized, but I could do nothing to avoid the mud slide that was slowly enveloping me. Finally, I put the book aside and lay gazing upward into darkness. I couldn't fight the fatigue any longer and drifted off into a shadowland where fantasy mingled with dream, and I was soon staring down an abomination: myself on D Day, coming undone. Now I saw myself as a figure in a newsreel, a running target. The beachhead was engulfed in flame. The ramps went down and I lurched forward onto the harsh ground, beckoning the platoon to follow me. I stumbled ashore through clouds of phosphorous and across an undulating terrain traversed by barriers of wire. A Jap machine gun, a Nambu, chattered from the flank and the air was thick with shrapnel, roiling, incandescent; the ground rocked with explosions. I turned to see my men hustling low as they scattered and deployed themselves at the edge of an embankment; some guys were falling now, still clutching their rifles at the instant of their collapse into the sand. I glimpsed white bones and blood, flowing like a sacrament. And then, frozen at the sight of so much blood, I sank into paralysis. I could make no movement, nor speak a word; in the grip of an overpowering numbness, I let my mind shut down. Nearby, one of my squad leaders questioned me with his eyes: *Lieutenant, what'll we do*? Beyond the power of thinking, I made no reply. Through billows of smoke, I saw my tentmates; I could tell that Veneris on my right and Stiles on my left were advancing steadily with their men. Over the radio I heard my company commander's frantic roar: *Get your troops moving!* But the command was without force, without meaning; it might as well have been shouted in an unknown tongue. My immobility was complete, as if tendrils of myself had burrowed down and sought root in the soil of Japan, rendering me brainless vegetation. Yet most intolerable—sickening and intolerable—was the look in the eyes of Stiles and Veneris, who, glancing back as they moved through the visible swarm of enemy bullets, turned upon me their measureless scorn and loathing. . . .

Coming awake, awash in sweat, I felt my pounding heart and was sure I'd made a strangled noise, loud enough to arouse my friends. But they still slept. For what seemed hours I lay there, listening to their breathing. They'd have to be sleeping like this, I thought at last, on that not too distant night when I would fulfill the promise that I'd made to myself and enact the lonesome little farce that I'd rehearsed so many times before. I was almost ready. Until this moment, I hadn't allowed myself to rehearse the first detail of the plan that would lead me into the jungle. But now I let my arm fall to the side of my cot, and I touched with my fingers the cold metal of the carbine cradled in its rack above the flooring. Beneath my hand, the barrel of the weapon was oily and slick, and I caressed its surface for long minutes as if touch in itself were reassurance and consolation. Then I drew back my arm. The thought of that night filled my mind like an ecstatic heartbeat. What night it would be I didn't know; I knew only that there would be such a night for certain, and soon—the night when at last I stole out of the tent and into the cricketing darkness, and there amid the hibiscus and the flame trees destroyed my fear forever. ♦

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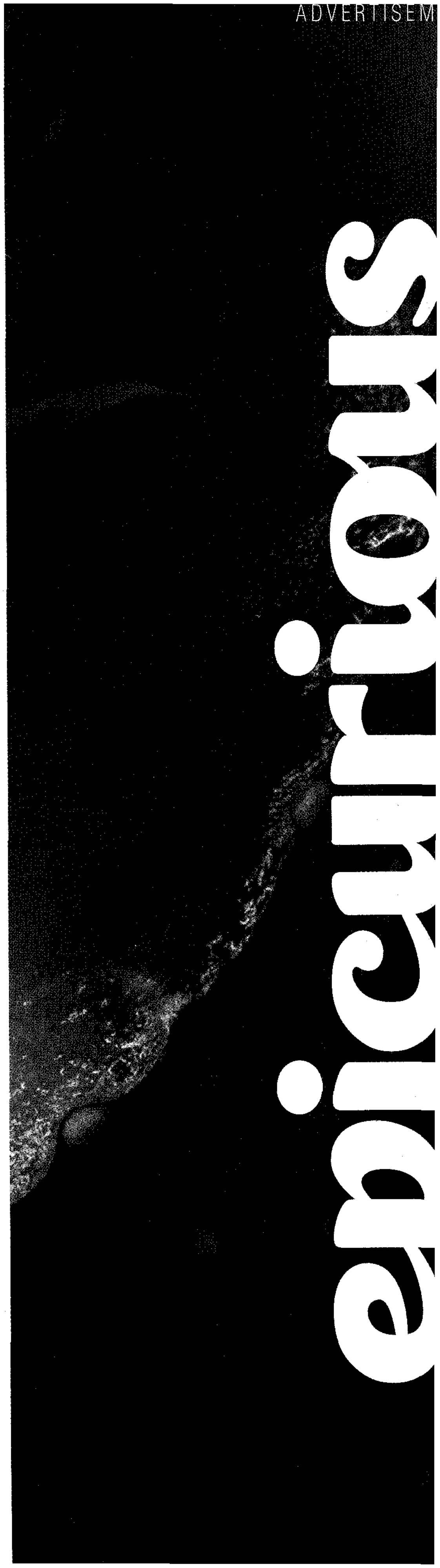

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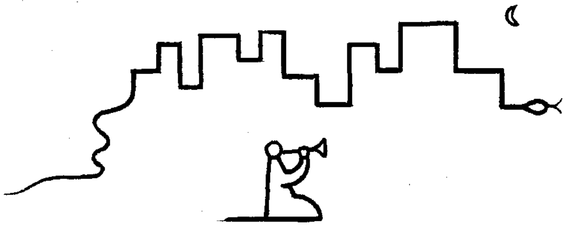


THE CURRENT CINEMA

MEIN CAMP

“Brüno.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

The task of making art out of camp—of crossing the borders of taste without hindrance or shame—has fallen of late to Sacha Baron Cohen. To find a successor to Borat, the genteel Kazakh adventurer whose exploits we followed in 2006, was never going to be easy, but somehow Baron Cohen came up with a character of even higher delirium. I refer, of course, to Julien, the loquacious lemur voiced by Baron Cohen in “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa,” who takes the sexual indeterminacy of ringtails to places we never dreamed it could go. How do you cap that?

Well, the answer is to don the hat of a Hasidic Jew, team it with a pair of wide black shorts, stroll down an Israeli street, and get pursued by a furious posse of the faithful. That is one of the stunts that are staged in the course of “Brüno,” the latest film from Larry Charles, the director of “Borat.” The new creation is Brüno, the Austrian fashionista with the big umlaut, played by Baron Cohen as a filleted, feather-cut popinjay. He has a hyena’s giggle and a long, swaying step that contains just the tiniest hint of goose. I was surprised by how little mileage the filmmakers get out of Brüno’s origins; the best national gag—that all he craves is to live “ze Austrian dream: ‘get a job, find a dungeon, raise ein family in it’ ”—comes not from the film but from his Twitter site.

Brüno is the host of “Funkyzeit,” a very à la mode show on Austrian TV, but is fired after an unfortunate Velcro incident on the catwalk. “For the second time in a century, the vorld has turned on Austria’s greatest man, just because he tried something different,” he says. It’s a lethal line, spinning self-pity out of cretinism, and, at moments like this, with innocence cozying up to indifference, you realize what a savage, Swiftian assault Baron Cohen could, if he put his mind to it, launch at our moral unknowingness. But the line is spoken in voice-over, not as part of a dramatic dialogue, and what the rest of “Brüno” demonstrates, to one’s growing disappointment and dismay, is a vehemently gifted man putting his body to it and leaving his mind behind.

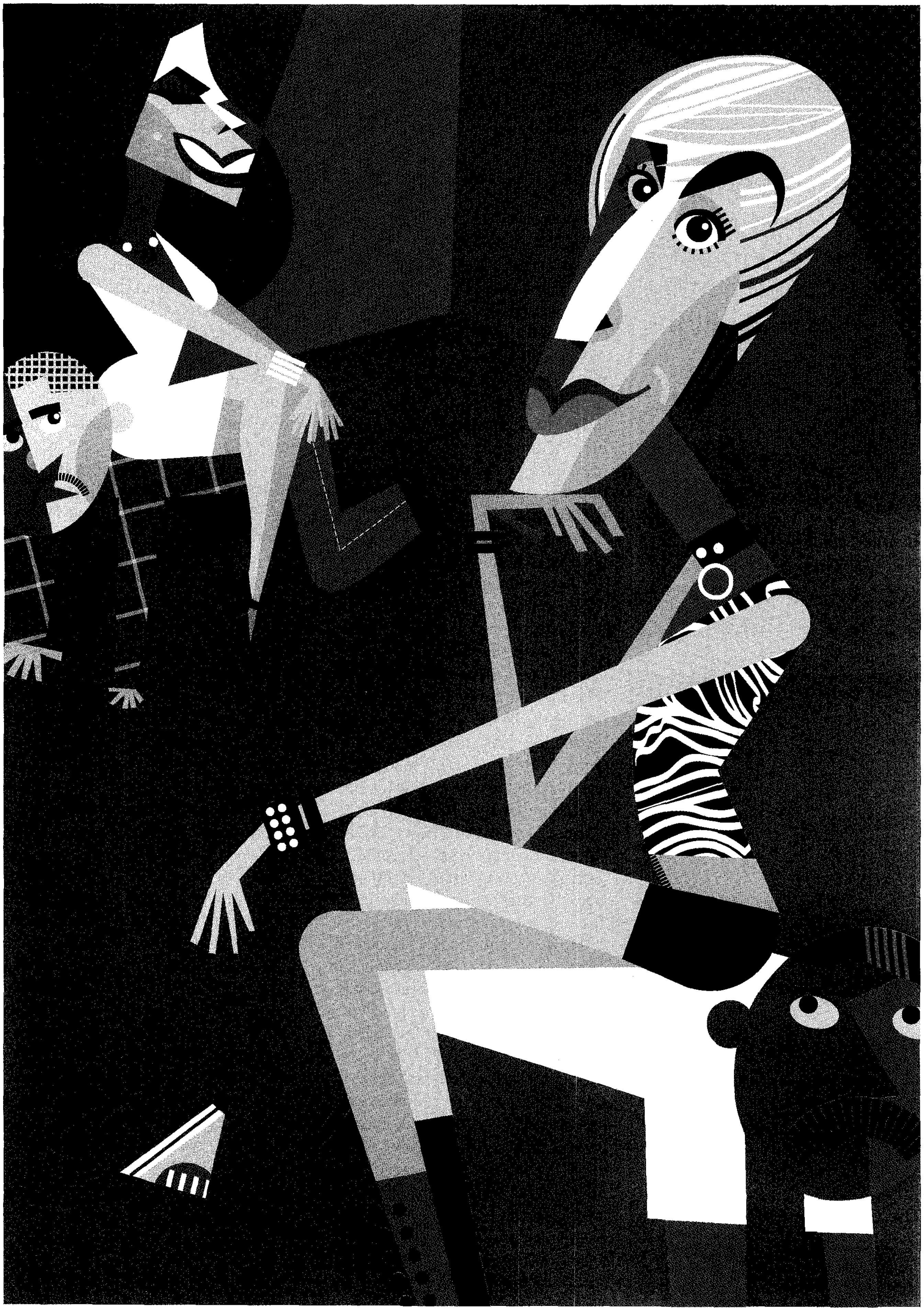
The plot, if that is the word for a headlong swarm of skits, finds our man trotting the globe in a desperate lunge for celebrity. Hence that trip to Israel, bringing peace to what he calls “the Middle Earth.” He even gets Israeli and Palestinian officials together at the same table, holding their hands while he sings a song of (though not in) perfect harmony. It’s horribly awkward, sure, yet the actual questions he puts rely on tired malapropism—mistaking Hamas for hummus, say—and, if you look at the faces of the negotiators, you don’t see dumb humiliation. You see tough, weathered types who have met many dunderheads in their time, and this fop is no different—he’s nothing to them, a speck, and they’ll brush him off the instant he leaves the room.

Although that doesn’t matter to Brüno, it matters a lot to “Brüno,” which aims, like “Borat,” to cut a chastening swath. Its main target area, as before, is the United States, or, as Baron Cohen sees it, a vast barrel writhing with shootable fish. Here are some of his victims: golden-blond P.R. floozies from California, good ol’ hunting boys from Alabama, and a couple of Southern pastors who specialize in converting homosexuals. Does anything strike you about that list? So clearly have they been picked for their mockability that Baron Cohen is left with nothing to prove; a genuinely bold interviewer might find that they did have something to say, but that is beyond his brief. Indeed, the first pastor slightly floors Brüno with a clear, uncontroversial statement of his belief in Jesus, whereupon Brüno takes emergency action in the only way he knows. He talks dirty: “You didn’t put any voodvind instruments up your Auschwitz?”

This kind of inquiry, fairly typical of the film, is in every sense below the belt. First, it suggests that Baron Cohen, having sneaked his way into a discussion, seldom has the nerve to keep his side of the bargain, preferring to cut things short with a gibe. Second, his comfort zone of comic reference, predicated on the discomfort of others, begins at the waistline and ends at the kneecaps. In his relentless, unmistakably Anglo-Freudian insistence on the genital and the anal, Baron Cohen takes the double entendre and strips it to a single one, placing in full view what used to be a smirking aside. Forget satire; this guy doesn’t want to scorch the earth anymore. He just wants to swing his dick.

I’m not joking, but Baron Cohen is. There really is a scene where, with a focus group watching clips of Brüno’s show (which he hopes will screen on American TV), he resorts to flaunting his member—or, for all I know, a schlong double—and twirling it at the camera, like the baton of a majorette. Then, presumably with a little help from C.G.I., it speaks. You could defend this as an update on the dog tattoo, inscribed on Harpo’s torso, that suddenly barks at Groucho in “Duck Soup,” but that was a wild visual pun—listen to the flesh of a mute!—whereas you can’t help feeling, as “Brüno” proceeds, that it is opting for the shock of

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: PABLO LOBATO



Sacha Baron Cohen plays Brüno, the Austrian fashionista with the big umlaut, in a film directed by Larry Charles.

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the gross-out whenever inspiration wilts. To be fair, the two young women beside me howled at the talking penis (not a bad emblem of the average male, they would say), and, if I had tried to explain that the Marx Brothers—sowers of extreme sedition, like Baron Cohen—sustained an entire career of ignobility without displaying a single erection, they would not have believed me. Even so, there was something forced in the women's laughter, as if they wanted to banish any suspicion of prudery, and to prove themselves far too cool for disgust.

Could that be Baron Cohen's cunning plan? Might he actually be in the business of revealing our cauterized senses, and the wound where our finer judgments are meant to be? A nice idea, but I'm afraid that "Brüno" feels hopelessly complicit in the prejudices that it presumes to deride. You can't honestly defend your principled lampooning of homophobia when nine out of every ten images that you project onscreen comply with the most threadbare cartoons of gay behavior. A schoolboy who watches a pirated DVD of this film will look at the prancing Austrian and find more, not fewer, reasons to beat up the kid on the playground who doesn't like girls. There is, on the evidence of this movie, no such thing as gay love; there is only gay sex, a superheated substitute for love, with its own code of vulcanized calisthenics whose aim is not so much to sate the participants as to embarrass onlookers from the straight—and therefore straitlaced—society beyond.

How efficient, though, is embarrassment as a comic device? It's a quick hit, and it corrals the audience on the side of smugness; but its victories are Pyrrhic, and it tends to fizzle out unless held in by a plot—as it was in "Fawlty Towers," which, from its base on the English seaside, fathomed the most embarrassable race on earth. Baron Cohen, in exporting his japes, comes up against a people much less devoted to the wince. I realized, watching "Borat" again, that what it exposed was not a vacuity in American manners but, more often than not, a tolerance unimaginable elsewhere. Borat's Southern hostess didn't shriek when he appeared with a bag of feces; she sympathized, and gently showed him what to do, and the same thing happens in "Brüno," when a martial-arts instructor, confronted by a foreigner with two dildos, doesn't flinch. He teaches Brüno some defensive moves, then adds, "This is totally different from anything I've ever done." Ditto the Hollywood psychic—another risky target, eh?—who watches Brüno mime an act of air-fellatio and says, after completion, "Well, good luck with your life." In both cases, I feel that the patsy, though gulled, comes off better than the gag man; the joke is on Baron Cohen, for foisting indecency on the decent. The joker is trumped by the square.

"Brüno" ends appallingly, with a musical montage of Sting, Bono, Elton John, and other well-meaners assisting mein Host in a sing-along. Here's the deal, apparently: if celebrities aren't famous enough for your liking (Ron Paul, Paula Abdul), or seem insufficiently schooled in irony, you make vicious sport of them, but if they're A-listers, insanely keen to be in on the joke, they can join your congregation. Would Baron Cohen dare to adopt a fresh disguise and trap Sting in some outlandish folly, or is he now too close a friend? To scour the world for little people you can taunt, and then pal up with the hip and rich: that is not an advisable path for any comic to pursue, let alone one as sharp and mercurial as Baron Cohen. All his genius, at present, is going into publicity, and, in the buildup to this film's release, he has not put a foot wrong—or, in the case of Eminem, a buttock. But the work itself turns out to be flat and foolish, bereft of Borat's good cheer: wholly unsuitable for children, yet propelled by a nagging puerility that will appeal only to those in the vortex of puberty, or to adults who have failed to progress beyond it. Call it, at best, a gaudy celebration of free speech, though be advised: before my screening, I had to sign a form requiring me "not to blog, Twitter or Facebook thoughts about the film before 6th July 2009." A guy pulls down his pants and bares his soul, and we are forbidden to have *thoughts*? What is this, the Anschluss? ♦

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The Front Row, a blog about movies.

BOOKS

XXXL

Why are we so fat?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

One of the most comprehensive data sets available about Americans—how tall they are, when they last visited a dentist, what sort of cereal they eat for breakfast, whether they have to pee during the night, and, if so, how often—comes from a series of studies conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Participants are chosen at random, interviewed at length, and subjected to a battery of tests in special trailers that the C.D.C. hauls around the country. The studies, known as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys, began during the Eisenhower Administration and have been carried out periodically ever since.

Human appetite is elastic: give us more and we'll eat more.

ZELOOT

In the early nineteen-nineties, a researcher at the C.D.C. named Katherine Flegal was reviewing the results of the survey then under way when she came across figures that seemed incredible. According to the first National Health study, which was done in the early nineteen-sixties, 24.3 per cent of American adults were overweight—roughly defined as having a body-mass index greater than twenty-seven. (The metrics are slightly different for men and women; by the study's definition, a woman who is five feet tall would count as overweight if she was more than a hundred and forty pounds, and a man who is six feet tall if he weighed more than two hundred and four pounds.) By the time of the second survey, conducted in the early nineteen-seventies, the proportion of overweight adults had increased by three-quarters of a per cent, to twenty-five per cent, and, by the third survey, in the late seventies, it had edged up to 25.4 per cent. The results that Flegal found so surprising came from the fourth survey. During the nineteen-eighties, the American gut, instead of expanding very gradually, had ballooned: 33.3 per cent of adults now qualified as overweight. Flegal began asking around at professional meetings. Had other researchers noticed a change in Americans' waistlines? They had not. This left her feeling even more perplexed. She knew that errors could have sneaked into the data in a variety of ways, so she and her colleagues checked and rechecked the figures. There was no problem that they could identify. Finally, in 1994, they published their findings in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. In just ten years, they showed, Americans had collectively gained more than a billion pounds. "If this was about tuberculosis, it would be called an epidemic," another researcher wrote in an editorial accompanying the report.

During the next decade, Americans kept right on gaining. Men are now on average seventeen pounds heavier than they were in the late seventies, and for women that figure is even higher: nineteen pounds. The proportion of overweight children, age six to eleven, has more than doubled, while the proportion of overweight adolescents, age twelve to nineteen, has more than tripled. (According to the standards of the United States military, forty per cent of young women and twenty-five per cent of young men weigh too much to enlist.) As the average person became heavier, the very heavy became heavier still; more than twelve million Americans now have a body-mass index greater than forty, which, for someone who is five feet nine, entails weighing more than two hundred and seventy pounds. Hospitals have had to buy special wheelchairs and operating tables to accommodate the obese, and revolving doors have had to be widened—the typical door went from about ten feet to about twelve feet across. An Indiana company called Goliath Casket has begun offering triple-wide coffins with reinforced hinges that can hold up to eleven hundred pounds. It has been estimated that Americans' extra bulk costs the airlines a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of jet fuel annually.

Such a broad social development seems to require an explanation on the same scale. Something big must have changed in America to cause so many people to gain so much weight so quickly. But what, exactly, is unclear—a mystery batter-dipped in an enigma.

Though weight-loss books will doubtless always be more popular, what might be called weight-gain books, which attempt to account for our corpulence, are an expanding genre. In "The

Evolution of Obesity" (Johns Hopkins; $40), Michael L. Power and Jay Schulkin take a frankly Darwinian approach. They argue that we are fat for the same reason that we are capable of studying our backsides in the mirror. "In many ways we can blame the obesity epidemic on our brains," they write.

Brains are calorically demanding organs. Our distant ancestors had small ones. *Australopithecus afarensis*, for example, who lived some three million years ago, had a cranial capacity of about four hundred cubic centimetres, which is roughly the same as a chimpanzee's. Modern humans have a cranial capacity of about thirteen hundred cubic centimetres. How, as their brains got bigger, did our forebears keep them running? According to what's known as the Expensive Tissue Hypothesis, early humans compensated for the energy used in their heads by cutting back on the energy used in their guts; as man's cranium grew, his digestive tract shrank. This forced him to obtain more energy-dense foods than his fellow-primates were subsisting on, which put a premium on adding further brain power. The result of this self-reinforcing process was a strong taste for foods that are high in calories and easy to digest; just as it is natural for gorillas to love leaves, it is natural for people to love funnel cakes.

Although no one really knows what life was like in the Pleistocene, it seems reasonable to assume that early humans lived, as it were, hand to mouth. In good times, they needed to stockpile food for use in hard times, but the only place they had to store it was on themselves. Body fat is energy-rich and at the same time lightweight: when the water is taken out, a gram of fat contains 9.4 kilocalories, compared with 4.3 kilocalories for a gram of protein, and when the water is left in, as it is on the human belly, a gram of fat still contains 9.1 kilocalories, while a gram of protein has just 1.2. As a consequence, a person with a genetic knack for storing fat would have had a competitive advantage. Power and Schulkin are both researchers at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and they argue that this advantage would have been especially strong for women. Human infants are unusually portly; among mammals, only hooded seals have a higher percentage of body fat at birth. (Presumably, babies need the extra reserves to fuel their oversized brains.) Tellingly, humans, unlike most other animals, have no set season of fertility. Instead, ovulation is tied to a woman's fat stores: those who are very thin simply fail to menstruate.

MY AUNTS

Grew up on the Jersey Shore in the nineteen-seventies.
Always making margaritas in the kitchen,
always laughing and doing their hair up pretty,
sharing lipstick and shoes and new juice diets;
always splitting the bills to the last penny,
stealing each other's clothes,
loving one another then complaining
as they walked out the door. Each one with her doe eyes,
each one younger than the last,
each older the next year, one year
further from their girlhoods of swimming
at Sandy Hook, doing jackknives off the diving board
after school, all of them
being loved by one boy and then another,
all driving further from the local fair, further from Atlantic City.
They used to smoke in their cars,
rolling the windows down and letting their red nails
hang out, little stoplights:
Stop now, before the green
comes to cover up your tall brown bodies.

—*Meghan O'Rourke*

Of course, for early humans putting on too many pounds would have been a significant disadvantage; it's hard to chase down a mastodon or track through a forest if you're tubby. Thus, there would appear to be a Darwinian argument against obesity as well. Power and Schulkin get around this problem by noting that, as a practical matter, opportunities for eating too much were limited. Austerity was the rule for hunter-gatherer societies, and that didn't change when people started to form farming communities, some ten thousand years ago. In fact, human remains from many parts of the world show that early agriculturalists were *less* well fed than their Paleolithic forebears; their skeletons are several inches shorter and often show signs of nutrition-related diseases, like anemia. Genes that controlled weight gain wouldn't have been selected for because they simply weren't needed.

In America today, by contrast, obtaining calories is very nearly effortless; as Power and Schulkin observe, with a few dollars it's possible to go to the grocery store and purchase enough sugar or vegetable oil to fulfill the average person's energy requirements for a week. The result is what's known as the "mismatch paradigm." The human body is "mismatched" to the human situation. "We evolved on the savannahs of Africa," Power and Schulkin write. "We now live in Candyland."

The evolutionary account of obesity is a powerful one—indeed, almost too powerful. If, as Power and Schulkin contend, humans are genetically programmed to put on weight whenever they encounter plenty, it would seem that by this point virtually everyone in America should be fat. Meanwhile, several million years of hominid evolution can't explain why it is just in the past few decades that waistlines have expanded.

Eric Finkelstein is a health economist at a research institute in North Carolina. In "The Fattening of America" (Wiley; $26.95), written with Laurie Zuckerman, he argues that Americans started to put on pounds in the eighties because it made financial sense for them to do so. Relative to other goods and services, food has got cheaper in the past few decades, and fattening foods, in particular, have become a bargain. Between 1983 and 2005, the real cost of fats and oils declined by sixteen per cent. During the same period, the real cost of soft drinks dropped by more than twenty per cent.

"For most people, an ice cold Coca-Cola used to be a treat reserved for special occasions," Finkelstein observes. Today, soft drinks account for about seven per cent of all the calories ingested in the United States, making them "the number one food consumed in the American diet." If, instead of sweetened beverages, the average American drank water, Finkelstein calculates, he or she would weigh fifteen pounds less.

The correlation between cost and consumption is pretty compelling; as Finkelstein notes, there's no more basic tenet of economics than that price matters. But, like evolution, economics alone doesn't seem adequate to the obesity problem. If it's cheap to consume too many calories' worth of ice cream or Coca-Cola, it's even cheaper to consume fewer.

In "The End of Overeating" (Rodale; $25.95), David A. Kessler, a former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, takes a somewhat darker view of the situation. It's not that sweet and oily foods have become less expensive; it's that they've been reëngineered while we weren't looking. Kessler spends a lot of time meeting with (often anonymous) consultants who describe how they are trying to fashion products that offer what's become known in the food industry as "eatertainment." Fat, sugar, and salt turn out to be the crucial elements in this quest: different "eatertaining" items mix these ingredients in different but invariably highly caloric combinations. A food scientist for Frito-Lay relates how the company is seeking to create "a lot of fun in your mouth" with products like Nacho Cheese Doritos, which meld "three different cheese notes" with lots of salt and oil. Another product-development expert talks about how she is trying to "unlock the code of craveability," and a third about the effort o "cram as much hedonics as you can n one dish."

Kessler invents his own term—"conditioned hypereating"—to describe how people respond to these laboratory-designed concoctions. Foods like Cinnabons and Starbucks' Strawberries & Crème Frappuccinos are, he maintains, like drugs: "Conditioned hypereating works the same way as other 'stimulus response' disorders in which reward is involved, such as compulsive gambling and substance abuse." For Kessler, the analogy is not merely rhetorical: research on rats, he maintains, proves that the animals' brains react to sweet, fatty foods the same way that addicts' respond to cocaine. A reformed overeater himself—"I have owned suits in every size," he writes—Kessler advises his readers to eschew dieting in favor of a program that he calls Food Rehab. The principles of Food Rehab owe a lot to those of drug rehab, except that it is not, as Kessler acknowledges, advisable to swear off eating altogether. "The substitute for rewarding food is often other rewarding food," he writes, though what could compensate for the loss of Nacho Cheese Doritos he never really explains.

In the early nineteen-sixties, a man named David Wallerstein was running a chain of movie theatres in the Midwest and wondering how to boost popcorn sales. Wallerstein had already tried matinée pricing and two-for-one specials, but to no avail. According to Greg Critser, the author of "Fat Land" (2003), one night the answer came to him: jumbo-sized boxes. Once Wallerstein introduced the bigger boxes, popcorn sales at his theatres soared, and so did those of another high-margin item, soda.

A decade later, Wallerstein had retired from the movie business and was serving on McDonald's board of directors when the chain confronted a similar problem. Customers were purchasing a burger and perhaps a soft drink or a bag of fries, and then leaving. How could they be persuaded to buy more? Wallerstein's suggestion—a bigger bag of fries—was greeted skeptically by the company's founder, Ray Kroc. Kroc pointed out that if people wanted more fries they could always order a second bag.

"But Ray," Wallerstein is reputed to have said, "they don't want to eat two bags—they don't want to look like a glutton." Eventually, Kroc let himself be convinced; the rest, as they say, is supersizing.

The elasticity of the human appetite is the subject of Brian Wansink's "Mindless Eating" (2006). Wansink is the director of Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab, and he has performed all sorts of experiments to test how much people will eat under varying circumstances. These have convinced him that people are—to put it politely—rather dim. They have no idea how much they want to eat or, once they have eaten, how much they've consumed. Instead, they rely on external cues, like portion size, to tell them when to stop. The result is that as French-fry bags get bigger, so, too, do French-fry eaters.

Consider the movie-matinée experiment. Some years ago, Wansink and his graduate students handed out buckets of popcorn to Saturday-afternoon filmgoers in Chicago. The popcorn had been prepared almost a week earlier, and then allowed to become hopelessly, squeakily stale. Some patrons got medium-sized buckets of stale popcorn and some got large ones. (A few, forgetting that the snack had been free, demanded their money back.) After the film, Wansink weighed the remaining kernels. He found that people who'd been given bigger buckets had eaten, on average, fifty-three per cent more.

In another experiment, Wansink invited participants to cook dinner for themselves with ingredients that he provided. One group got big boxes of pasta and big bottles of sauce, a second smaller boxes and smaller bottles. The first group prepared twenty-three per cent more, and downed it all. In yet another experiment, Wansink rigged up bowls that could be refilled, via a hidden tube. When he served soup out of the trick bowls, people, he writes, "ate and ate and ate." On average, they consumed seventy-three per cent more than those who were served from regular bowls. "Give them a lot and they eat a lot," he writes.

Before McDonald's discovered the power of re-portioning, it offered just a small bag of French fries, which contained two hundred calories. Today, a small order of fries has two hundred and thirty calories, and a large order five hundred. (Add fifteen calories for each package of ketchup.) Similarly, a McDonald's soda used to be eight ounces. Today, a small soda is sixteen ounces (a hundred and fifty calories), and a large soda is thirty-two ounces (three hundred calories). Perhaps owing to the influence of fast-food culture, up-sizing has by now spread to all sorts of other venues. In a 2002 study, Marion Nestle, a nutrition professor at New York University, and Lisa Young, an adjunct there, examined the offerings, past and present, at American supermarkets. They found that during the nineteen-eighties the amount of food that was counted as a single serving increased rapidly. A similar jump showed up in cookbooks; when the researchers compared dessert recipes in old and new editions of volumes like "The Joy of Cooking," they discovered that, even in cases where the recipes themselves had remained unchanged, the predicted number of servings had shrunk. According to the federally supported National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the bagels that Americans eat have in the past twenty years swelled from a hundred and forty to three hundred and fifty calories each. If, as Wansink argues, people are relying on external cues to determine their consumption, then the new, bigger bagel is sneaking in an additional two hundred and ten calories. For someone who is in the habit of eating a bagel a day, these extra calories translate into a weight gain of more than a pound a month.

So what's wrong with putting on an extra pound, or ten pounds, or, for that matter, a hundred and ten? According to the contributors to "The Fat Studies Reader" (forthcoming from New York University; $27), nothing. The movement known variously as "size acceptance," "fat acceptance," "fat liberation," and "fat power" has been around for more than four decades; in 1967, at a "fat-in" staged in Central Park, participants vilified Twiggy, burned diet books, and handed out candy. More recently, fat studies has emerged as a field of scholarly inquiry; four years ago, the Popular Culture Association/American Cultural Association added a fat-studies component to its national conferences, and in 2006 Smith College hosted a three-day seminar titled "Fat and the Academy."

Among the founding principles of the discipline is that weight is not a dietary issue but a political one. "Fat studies is a radical field, in the sense that it goes to the root of weight-related belief systems," Marilyn Wann, who describes herself as five feet four and two hundred and eighty-five pounds, writes in her foreword to the "Reader." Kathleen LeBesco, a communications professor at Marymount Manhattan College and another contributor, has put it this way:

> Fat people are widely represented in popular culture and in interpersonal interactions as revolting—they are agents of abhorrence and disgust. But if we think about "revolting" in a different way . . . in terms of overthrowing authority, rebelling, protesting, and rejecting, then corpulence carries a whole new weight as a subversive cultural practice.

According to the authors of "The Fat Studies Reader," the real problem isn't the sudden surge in obesity in this country but the surge in stories about obesity. Weight, by their account, is, like race or sex or bone structure, a biological trait over which individuals have no—or, in the case of fat, very limited—control. A "societal fat phobia," Natalie Boero, a sociology professor at San Jose State University, writes, "in part explains why the 'obesity epidemic' is only now beginning to be critically deconstructed."

Undeniably, the fat—the authors of "The Reader" are adamant advocates for the "f" word—are subject to prejudice and even cruelty. A 2008 report by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, at Yale, noted that teachers consistently hold lower expectations of overweight children, and that three out of five of the heaviest kids have been teased at school. The same people who are repelled by racist or misogynistic humor seem to feel that it is perfectly acceptable to make fat jokes.

But, just because size bias exists it doesn't follow that putting on weight is a subversive act. In contrast to the field's claims about itself, fat studies ends up taking some remarkably conservative positions. It effectively allies itself with McDonald's and the rest of the processed-food industry, while opposing the sorts of groups that advocate better school-lunch programs and more public parks. To claim that some people are just meant to be fat is not quite the same as arguing that some people are just meant to be poor, but it comes uncomfortably close.

As its title suggests, "Globesity" (Earthscan; $34.95) takes an international approach to the problem of weight gain. The book's authors—Francis Delpeuch, Bernard Maire, Emmanuel Monnier, and Michelle Holdsworth—observe that, while Americans were the first to fatten up, they no longer lead the pack. "Like it or not, we have no choice but to face up to the numbers: current data reveal that in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Malta, and Slovakia, the proportion of overweight adults is actually higher than in the U.S.," they write. In Asia, Africa, and South America, too, obesity is on the rise. Although nearly a billion of the world's most impoverished citizens still suffer from too few calories, Delpeuch and his colleagues note that it's those living just above the poverty level who appear to be gaining weight most rapidly. It may seem to go without saying that being fat is better than starving, but even this truism, the authors argue, is no longer entirely true: in the new world order, it is possible to be overweight and malnourished at the same time. "People on modest incomes suddenly find a cheap, calorie-packed diet within their grasp and make the most of it as soon as they can," they write. "Unfortunately this means sacrificing many elements that are nutritionally more valuable."

The authors of "Globesity" are, for the most part, nutrition researchers, and, in contrast to the contributors to "The Fat Studies Reader," they see obesity as a disaster, both for the individuals who suffer from it and for the health-care systems they are likely to enter. Type 2 diabetes, coronary disease, hypertension, various kinds of cancers—including colorectal and endometrial—gallstones, and osteoarthritis are just some of the conditions that have been linked to excess weight. (Last month the *Times* reported that gout, once considered a disease of royalty, is, as the population gets fatter, making a comeback among the middle class.) It ha been estimated that the extra pound carried by Americans add ninety billio dollars a year to the country's medical spending. No credible estimates exist for global costs, but, Delpeuch and his co-authors write, "Obesity is inescapably confirming itself as one of the biggest drains" on national health-care budgets.

Whether anything will be done—or even can be done—to stem the global tide of obesity is, at this point, an open question. The World Health Organization has come up with more than three dozen actions that governments could take to encourage better eating and fitness; these include imposing a "fat tax" on caloric snacks, improving health education, regulating food and beverage advertising, limiting the foods available in public facilities, and insuring access to sidewalks and bike paths.

But, as anyone who has ever gone on a diet knows, weight that was easy to gain is hard to lose. If anything, this is even more true on a societal level. Those politicians who could take the recommended actions tend, the authors of "Globesity" point out, to be in thrall to the very interest groups that are profiting from the status quo. (It's probably no coincidence that, in a period when the rest of the world has come to look more like Americans, U.S. corporations have been making significant investments—some fifty-five billion dollars a year—in food-processing and distribution facilities abroad.) "To conquer obesity will thus require a complete new awareness, the re-education of the great mass of consumers, and this seems a distant prospect," they write.

In the end, it's hard to argue with such fatalism. The problem goes even beyond the corporate interests that have brought us "eatertaining" foods, Value Meals, and oceans of high-fructose corn syrup. Collecting the maximum number of calories with the least amount of effort is, after all, the dream of every creature, including those too primitive to dream. With the BK™ Quad Stacker—four beef patties, four pieces of bacon, and four slices of cheese for $4.99—man edges close to realizing this ambition. And that's without the fries. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

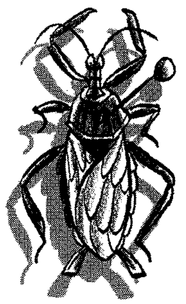
Elizabeth Kolbert takes readers' questions.

BRIEFLY NOTED

International Incidents

The Generalissimo, *by Jay Taylor (Belknap; $35).* Chiang Kai-shek has long been viewed as a failure for having lost mainland China to Mao's People's Liberation Army in a stunningly short span of time. This richly detailed biography argues that Chiang's neo-Confucian vision for a modern China may yet win. Chiang saw himself as central to China's destiny, yet his years in exile were some of his happiest; as he once wrote, "Trouble is an excellent tonic." While Mao was inflicting the Great Leap Forward on mainland China, Chiang was instituting a widely admired program of land reform on Taiwan, and today the raucously democratic island is often looked to in the People's Republic as a model of prosperity. Drawing on a revelatory cache of newly available diaries and records, Taylor reveals the complexities of the soldier and statesman, showing him to be shockingly brutal at times, oddly passive at others, naïvely earnest, quick to tears, and always surrounded by intrigue.

Vietnam at War, *by Mark Philip Bradley (Oxford; $29.95).* Western narratives of the twentieth-century wars in Vietnam, Bradley writes, have "rendered the Vietnamese almost invisible in the making of their own history." In this corrective study, Bradley skimps on anecdote and characterization, and his short treatise too often reads like a long encyclopedia entry. At its best, though, the book is a kind of review of Vietnamese literature, drawing on the war diary of a conflicted provincial physician, a novel about a paratrooper who is afraid to jump, irreverent peasant verse, playful proverbs ("The moon in China is much rounder than in the USA"), and the nineteen-sixties antiwar songs of the draft-dodging Trinh Công Son.



A Terrible Splendor, *by Marshall Jon Fisher (Crown; $25).* This thoroughly researched account uses the deciding 1937 Davis Cup match between Germany's Gottfried von Cramm and the U.S.'s Don Budge to explore both the pre-topspin era of tennis and prewar international tension. The debt to John McPhee's justly sanctified "Levels of the Game" is acknowledged and largely paid, but Fisher's dutiful focus on the historical details of the era leads to long rehashes of familiar Nazi outrages. Von Cramm emerges as an elegant resister to the Reich, a persecuted homosexual who is clearly more interesting to the author than the bland, prodigiously talented Budge. But the figure at the edge who overshadows the narrative, as he did the tennis world until the Open system began, in 1968, is Bill Tilden, Cramm's coach, a vain, theatrical box-office star who essentially invented the mid-century game.

Right of Thirst, *by Frank Huyler (Harper Perennial; $14.99).* The cardiologist Charles Anderson is reeling from the death of his wife, from cancer, when he volunteers to assist with earthquake relief in an unnamed Islamic country that is constantly in conflict with its neighbor (no prizes for guessing). Setting up camp along the mountainous border between the two nations, Anderson and a German colleague never encounter the refugees for whom they have travelled to "a wind-scoured field of stones on the other side of the earth"; instead, artillery fire begins, and the two find themselves embroiled in something resembling the brief high-altitude Kargil War, fought between India and Pakistan in 1999. Huyler has written fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and is himself a medical doctor. He writes in a surgical fashion—with precision and care, making no sudden metaphorical movements. Huyler's protagonist resists easy answers or self-congratulatory axioms in examining the ethics of humanitarian intervention. "Remember that the world is indifferent not only to our fates, but also to the work we do," he writes in a letter to his son.

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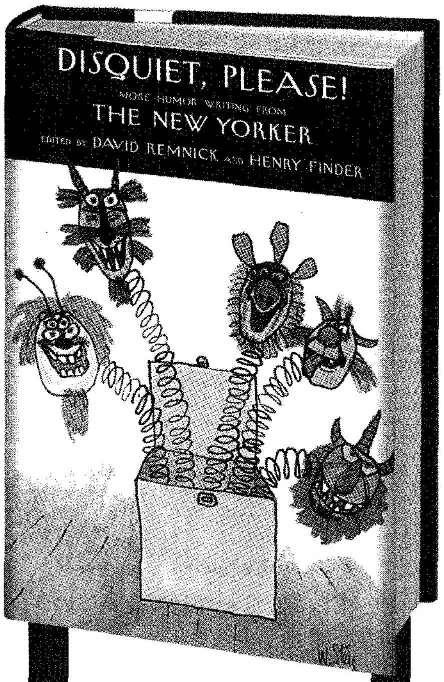
FROM
THE NEW YORKER

If laughter is the best medicine, Disquiet, Please! *is a wonder drug.*



An uproarious sampling of humor writing from *The New Yorker*, including fancies, rebukes, asides, and musings from

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THE THEATRE

SEX IN THE HEAD

Helen Mirren takes on the last taboo in "Phèdre."

BY JOHN LAHR

"I want to be the Sarah Bernhardt of my generation," Helen Mirren confided to her older sister before auditioning, successfully, for Britain's National Youth Theatre, at eighteen, in 1963. More than forty years on, with scores of outstanding stage and screen performances behind her, Mirren has accomplished her mission; in Britain, her prowess and her popularity are uncontested. As if to underscore the point, she has taken on the great classical role that Bernhardt played throughout her career, from age twenty-nine until her late sixties: Phèdre, in Jean Racine's 1677 tragedy (in a translation by Ted Hughes, at London's Royal National Theatre). Thanks to a venture called "NT Live," "Phèdre" was the first of four National productions to be broadcast in art cinemas around the world; Mirren's performance has been shown globally on more than two hundred screens so far and seen by about thirty-five thousand paying customers. Statistically speaking, Mirren, not Bernhardt, is now the most famous Phèdre of all time. However, it's the nuance, not the numbers, that makes her performance authoritative. Mirren's dissection of the Athenian queen who falls in love with her stepson takes the audience into the darkest recesses of the heart of an emotional terrorist, whose only hostage is herself.

"My own craving fills me with horror," says Phèdre, the wife of Theseus (Stanley Townsend), Athens's rambunctious, long-absent king. She desires Theseus' son, Hippolytus (Dominic Cooper), who loves Aricia (the compelling Ruth Negga), the daughter of a former enemy, whom Theseus has forbidden to marry. As a defense against her incestuous feelings, Phèdre throws up a perverse firewall. She persecutes her beloved Hippolytus into exile and forces herself into a suicidal solitary confinement. "I turned against myself—to defend myself," she confesses to her starchy nurse and retainer, Oenone (the expert Margaret Tyzack). Hysterics are melodramatic, and Phèdre is a sensational early example of this self-aggrandizing breed whose sexuality takes the form of scene-making. Phèdre is a gourmand of grief: she stuffs herself on shame, binges on lamentation, gobbles down grievance. The exhibition of her suffering is both an act of abdication and an unforgettable attack.

Even before she appears onstage, Phèdre's reputation as a "diabolical woman" precedes her. From Hippolytus, we hear of her "futile hatred" of him; from his counsellor, Théramène (John Shrapnel), we learn that Phèdre is "a dying woman, wanting only to die," "tired of herself, tired of the very daylight"; from the exasperated and exhausted Oenone, we know that she wishes "to shut the whole world from her sight." Phèdre, a demigoddess and descendant of Helios, the sun god, is defined by shadow. "I want to be hidden in a dark wood," she says. Nonetheless, in her first entrance, veiled in purple and propping her febrile body up against the marble palace wall, Phèdre staggers into the scorching day and presents herself almost as a sacrifice to the vast azure sky. "Maybe you blush to see me like this. / You god of the sun—look at me for the last time," she says. Phèdre's pain is real; it is also, however, a form of seduction, an unconscious strategy to bind the world's attention to her. When Theseus is declared dead, after many years of wanderlust and derring-do, Phèdre finds herself free to confess her feelings to the abashed Hippolytus. "Look at me—see a woman in frenzy," she says to him. His indifference inspires her to even greater theatrics; she falls to her knees, clinging to his leg. Calling herself "depraved," a "monster," a "disgusting pest," she grabs Hippolytus sword and prods him to put an end to he savage love:

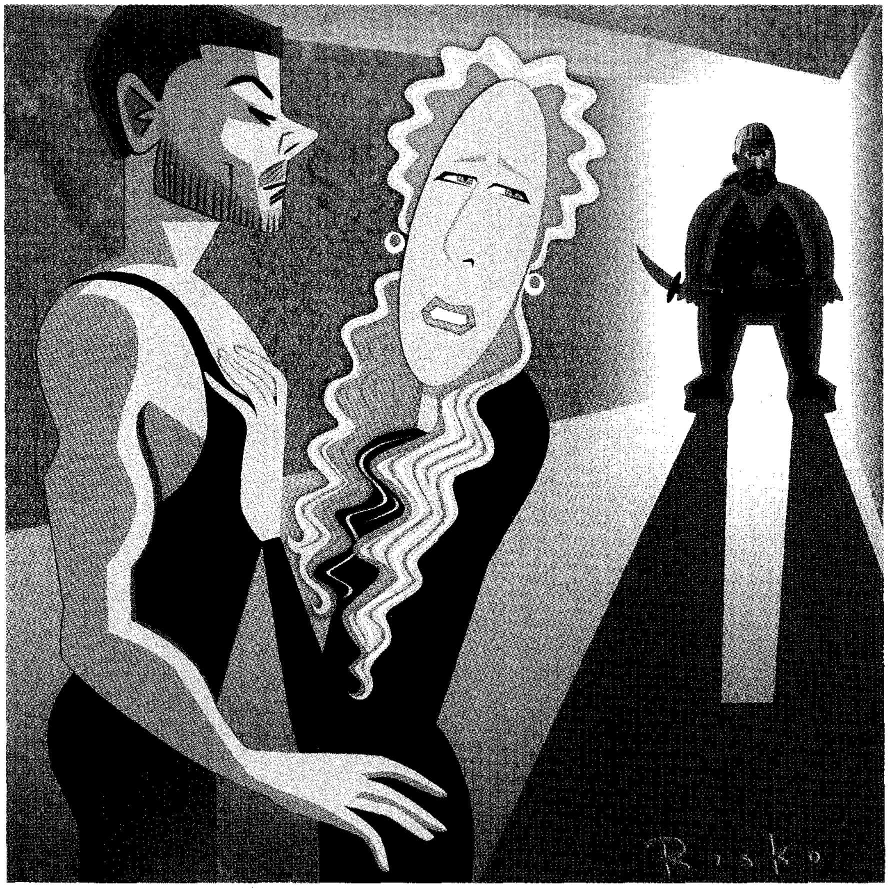
Look—my heart. Here.
Bury your sword here.
This heart is utterly corrupt.
It cannot wait to expiate its evil.

I feel it lifting to meet your stroke.
  Strike!
Or am I beneath your contempt?

Phèdre's obsessive, autoerotic suffering runs the risk of being dramatically one-note; Mirren, however, finds deep seams of emotional truth that transcend Racine's structural contrivances. She parses Phèdre's brazen abasement with an excitement that manages to suggest both self-destruction and sensuality, both guilt and predatory wiles. Theseus may be, as Phèdre says, "the laughing ravisher of a thousand women"—Ariadne and Helen of Troy are among those he has kidnapped on his rambles—but Phèdre is the one he kept. Like her character, Mirren knows how to deploy carnality to her advantage. She arrives onstage with a clear-eyed sexual alertness. "Venus has fastened on me like a tiger," she says, her hand falling across her abdomen, and you believe her. Describing the "hideous injury" of love at first sight, Phèdre tells Oenone, "I could not speak. I could hardly stand. / I knew then the goddess had found me— / The latest in the lineage that she loathes."

As Mirren plays her, it's the battle that Phèdre wages against her fate, not her sexual feelings, that makes her heroic. "The curse of Venus is fatal," she says early on, adding, "I die last and the most miserable." Her blighted family tree looms large in her mind, if not in ours. She is the sister of Ariadne, who hanged herself, and the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë, who had sex with a bull and gave birth to the Minotaur. "What a crazed, pitiful thing / She made of my mother!" Phèdre says of the goddess of love. "It is impossible / To humiliate me any further," she brays at Venus, after Hippolytus cold-shoulders her.

But contemporary audiences don't even believe in their own gods, let alone the classical ones. Because Phèdre's lineage has little purchase on the current imagination, her terror loses much of its weight. Voltaire called Racine's Phèdre the "masterpiece of the human mind." The play certainly contains great psychological insight and poetry; to a modern audience, which expects character to be revealed through action, however, its dramaturgy feels static. Almost all the crucial events happen offstage, and are narrated but not shown. Although three of the five main characters are dead by the finale—a trifecta of torment—only Phèdre dies in front of us: she poisons herself offstage, but still manages to stagger out to give Theseus a white-faced but lucid explanation of her gesture. Racine's characters are well-polished messengers of themes, integers in an Aristotelian equation, factored out to yield a stately balance. The play is one thousand six hundred and fifty-four lines; its dramatic reversal—the return of the presumed-dead Theseus—arrives at line 827, exactly the play's halfway mark.



Dominic Cooper, Helen Mirren, and Stanley Townsend in Racine's tragedy.

The director, Nicholas Hytner, who partnered with Mirren for a superb 2000 production of Tennessee Williams's "Orpheus Descending," another tale of doomed love, has given "Phèdre" the advantage of a gorgeous Bob Crowley set, one of the best for any National production I've seen. Crowley fills half the stage with a cloudless cerulean sky, the rest with the monumental forms of a low-angled marble roof, pocked marble walls, and a jagged, crumbling outcropping of stone. Brightness bears down on the behemoth lair and its dwarfed denizens, a cunning correlative for a tragedy in which heat, and hiding from it, are central. In Ted Hughes's version, Racine's ravishing alexandrines are stripped down to a rough, muscular, vernacular directness. Hughes's idiom has its own fierce urgency; its sinew is most vividly on display in the blood-spattered Théramène's heart-wrenching soliloquy—Shrapnel nails it—in which he reports on Hippolytus' violent death in a tidal wave, which was summoned by the gods to kill the son whom the outraged Theseus believed had cuckolded him:

The horses galloped away with their
  weightless bundle
That had fed them, and that was your
  son.
We followed—all of us crying openly
Like forsaken children.
The trail was easy—he had signed every
  stone,
Left us a rag of flesh on every thorn.

Hytner's sure hand slips only in the casting of Townsend as Theseus. A huge man with a long gray ponytail, Townsend is a swashbuckling but jarring presence. He looks the part; he just can't play it. He gives a minor-league performance in a major-league production. Still, the shock and awe of the play come powerfully through; it is a tragedy for Phèdre and a triumph for Mirren. ♦

ON TELEVISION

MAN IN THE MOON

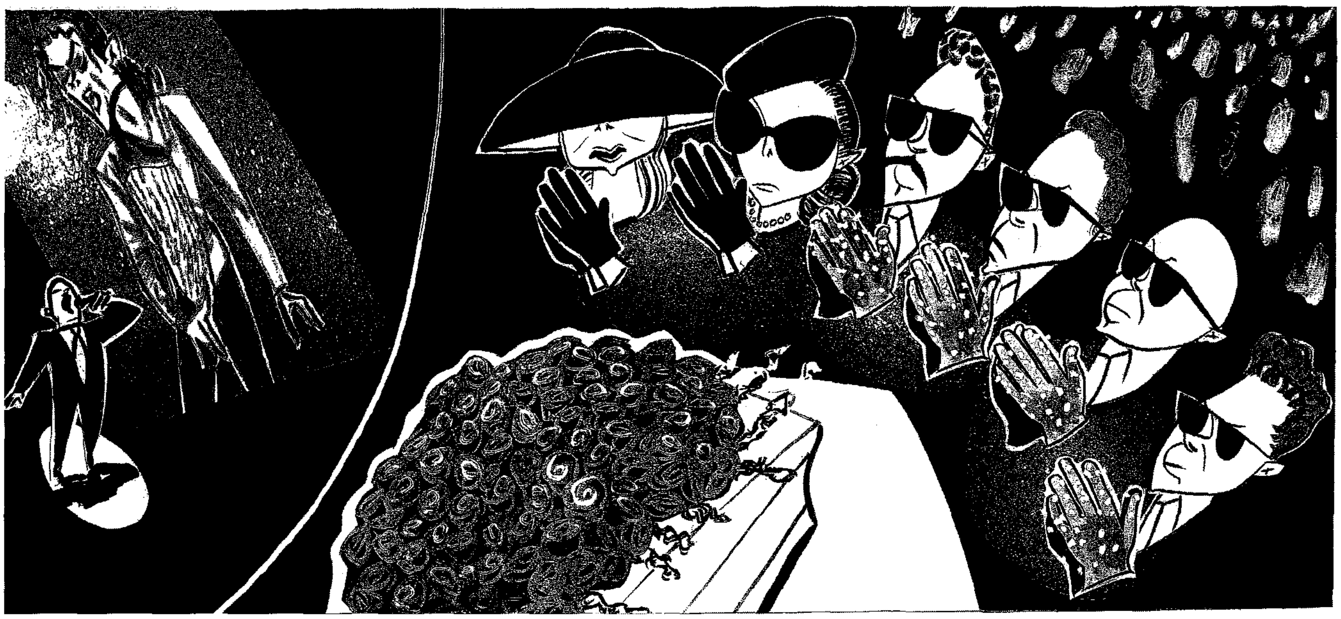
Michael Jackson, forever out of reach.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

To TV viewers watching Michael Jackson's funeral last Tuesday and the movements leading up to it—like the early-morning motorcade taking Jackson's family to Forest Lawn cemetery and then to the Staples Center—the atmosphere seemed calm. There are five Forest Lawn cemeteries in the greater Los Angeles area, the viewing audience was helpfully informed by reporters and commentators on all the networks and cable channels; this one is in the Hollywood Hills, and is the resting place of Lucille Ball, Marvin Gaye, Bette Davis, and many other stars. The parade of passing never ends; a month ago, David Carradine was buried there. Los Angeles sprawled and lazed in the morning sun, and made it easy for those inside the *cordon de célébrité* that surrounded Forest Lawn and the Staples Center to get to where they needed to go. Outside that boundary, commuters had more than the usual tie-ups to complain about, but the inconvenience, and whatever horn-honking resulted from it, was blessedly underreported to the national viewing audience. The big local-impact story was about money: viewers had to endure frequent quotations of the deficits of both the State of California and Los Angeles, and a lot of ballpark-figuring about how much Jackson's memorial was going to cost the city and how much of that cost would be offset by revenue from visitors. (All the initial estimates were way off base. The city's extra efforts, the Los Angeles *Times* reported the next day, cost $1.4 million, not four million dollars, as had been feared, and the number of visitors to the city was nothing like the thundering herd of half a million that had been anticipated.)

Geraldo Rivera, on Fox News, talked about how disorderly the Jackson family's planning was, how they were making it up as they went along, but from a distance the proceedings looked sunny and festive. An air of pleasant expectation could be felt, as if you were watching happy crowds gather for a free summer concert. Of course, that *was* what was happening. It was going to be a "star-studded" event, reporters kept saying, and tickets were free, though there weren't enough to satisfy the demand. (In the grand tradition, scalpers stepped in to help the needy.) Even in death, Jackson played to a packed house.

Outside the Staples Center, big white boards with Jackson's photograph and "1958-2009" had been set up, some of them for fans to write on and some of them for photo ops, like the backdrops that corporate sponsors install at red-carpet and promotional events. Jesse Jackson and his family stopped to pose in front of one of the panels, blocking the picture of M.J. Jackson wasn't one of the speakers that day, but a couple of other men of the cloth did address the audience, one of them being Al Sharpton, who has not lost his competitive edge when it comes to arriving so quickly at any event combining newsworthiness, controversy, and national television that it sometimes seems as if he were there before the thing had happened. Sharpton moved people at the service; he said that Jackson had always "kept going, because he didn't accept limitations. . . . He put on one glove, pulled his pants up"—a reference to the tug that Jackson often made while performing, in order to show off his footwork, but perhaps not the most felicitous clause of the day—"and broke down the color curtain." Sharpton's remarks came near the midpoint of the funeral, and they drove home just how difficult it was for the speakers to characterize Michael Jackson's work and, even more so, his life. Sharpton, looking down at Jackson's children, in the fron



La Toya, Janet, Marlon, Jermaine, Randy, and Tito Jackson celebrate and mourn their brother at the Staples Center, in Los Angeles.

row, said, "Wasn't nothin' strange about your daddy; it was strange what your daddy had to deal with"—a declaration that was as complicated and vexed as it was appropriate and kind.

Every so often, appearing at the bottom of the TV screen were the words "AEG Live Entertainment"; the company that produced the telecast was also behind the gruelling fifty-concert tour that Jackson had been preparing for when he died. (After his death, AEG Live's C.E.O. turned up on talk shows and spoke about Jackson's readiness, fitness, and enthusiasm—a smart public-relations move, meant to counter rumblings that the company had pushed him too hard.) The service itself was homey, at times solemn and at times sweet, with singing performances in various states of polish, but the production was as slick as ice—as if it were ready to be put on disk, shrink-wrapped, and shipped to stores the next day. Between speakers, the camera would move to the front of the stage to show the coffin—a shiny, gold-plated case with a hill of roses on it (amazingly, no TV commentator I heard wondered aloud what the coffin had cost)—then swoop up and away to take in the crowd from on high and then the entire stage: it was pure show biz. But how could it have been otherwise? Jackson was show biz almost his whole life, and the outpouring of sadness and real love from fans in the days after his death had a lot to do with their yearning to be close to someone they never could be close to.

Jackson, for his part, was trapped in his own skin—and has *anyone's* skin ever been such a topic of speculation, analysis, and criticism? At one point in the service, we heard a recording of Jackson saying, in that softly pleading voice of his, "It feels good to be thought of as a person, not as a personality." This occurred during an audiovisual montage that began with Jackson raspily shouting "Hey!" and focussed on his percussive insistence on himself as performer—the way he adored the entertainers who came before him, and built on their work. But, when the sequence ended with a shot of Jackson in a Christ-on-the-Cross position, my heart sank. It seems that no one *is* able to see him as a person, not as a personality, and it was he, of course, who made sure of that.

Sharpton said that Jackson "brought blacks and whites and Asians and Latinos together" and "made us love each other." I'm not sure about that: why, then, didn't everyone do a better job of loving him back? Well, we know that one person did. At the end of the funeral, Jackson's daughter, Paris, who had been mostly hidden from the world until that day, unexpectedly spoke, saying that he was "the best father you can ever imagine" and "I love him so much," before turning to the arms of one of her aunts. For an important moment, the talk of Jackson's legacy and personality was silenced, and we could feel, if we hadn't already, what had been lost—a little girl's father, gone too soon. ♦

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A FEAST OF DELICIOUS WRITING ON FOOD AND DRINK, SEASONED WITH A GENEROUS DASH OF CARTOONS.

A TASTE OF THE
MENU

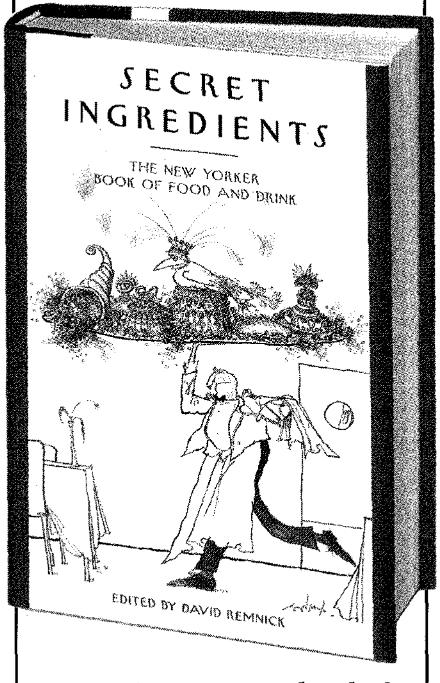
WOODY ALLEN .... on dieting the Dostoyevsky way

ADAM GOPNIK .... on the crisis in French cooking

M.F.K. FISHER .... on the trouble with tripe

BILL BUFORD ....on oysters

AND MORE!



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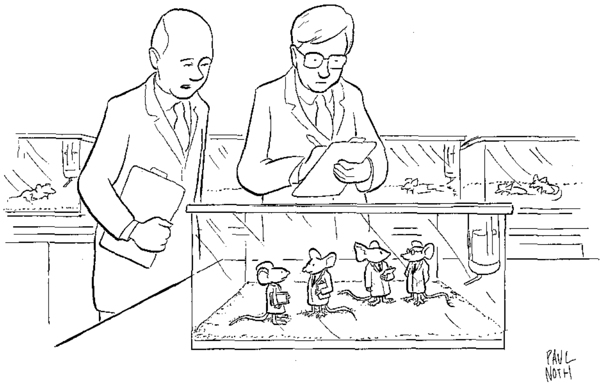
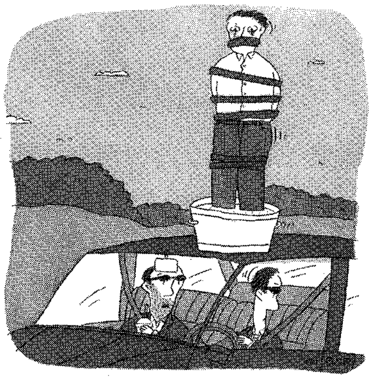
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Zachary Kanin, must be received by Sunday, July 19th. The finalists in the June 29th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 3rd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"O.K., let's slowly lower in the grant money."
Todd Bearson, Arlington, Mass.



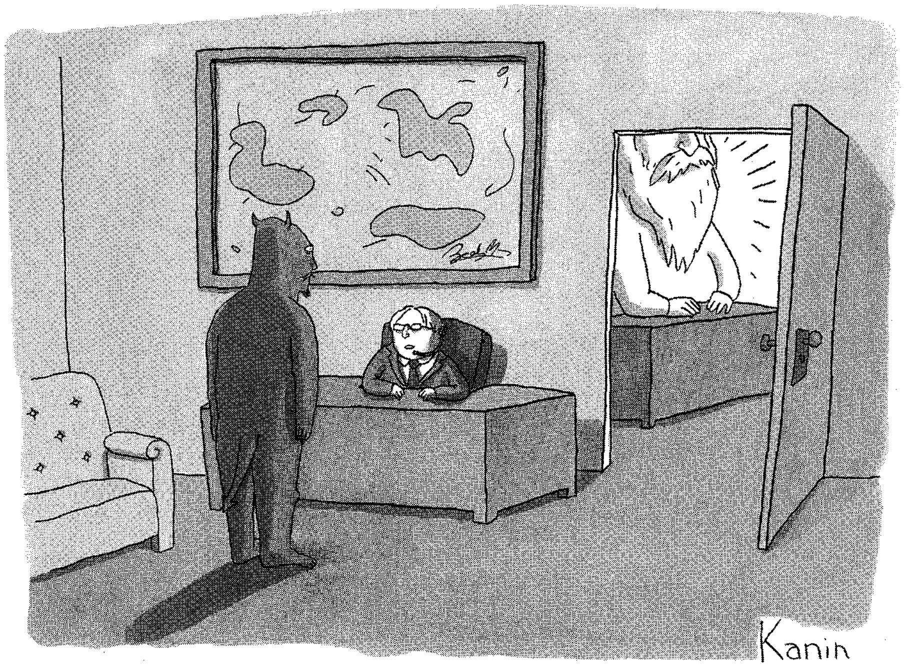
THE FINALISTS

"The instructions should have mentioned that you need a body of water."
Peter Bleyleben, Chestnut Hill, Mass.

"That's smart, Eddie. The first place cops look is in the trunk."
David Wilkner, Pawtucket, R.I.

"What do you mean you don't remember? Either he sleeps with the fishes or he don't."
Tim Wibert, Okemos, Mich.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



" "

Smarter business for a Smarter Planet:

What's the window of opportunity on an opportunity?

We live on a planet that is now generating more than 43,000 gigabytes of data per day. Think about the opportunity that comes with that ocean of data. The computing models and advanced analytics we have today actually allow us to use that information, not merely to sense and respond but to predict. So data isn't just telling us what's going on in the world—it's telling us where the world is going. Recognizing patterns. Crystallizing trends. Using information to make smarter decisions and to apply the right insights to the business. Today, IBM is helping companies do just that. From detecting fraudulent behavior before insurance claims are paid to improving customer retention by spotting the patterns of people who are likely to defect to competitors. A smarter business needs smarter thinking. Let's build a smarter planet. ibm.com/analytics

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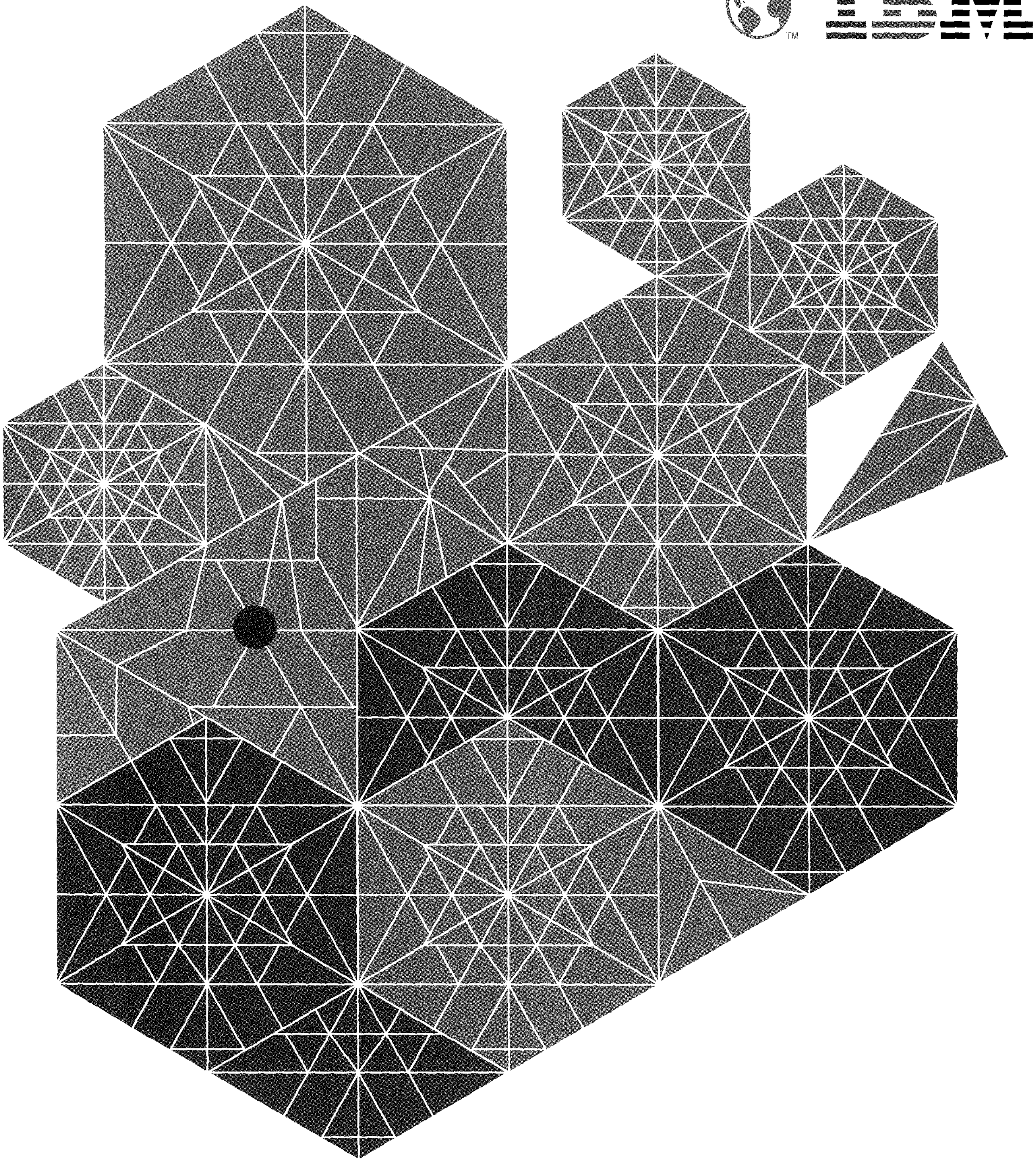

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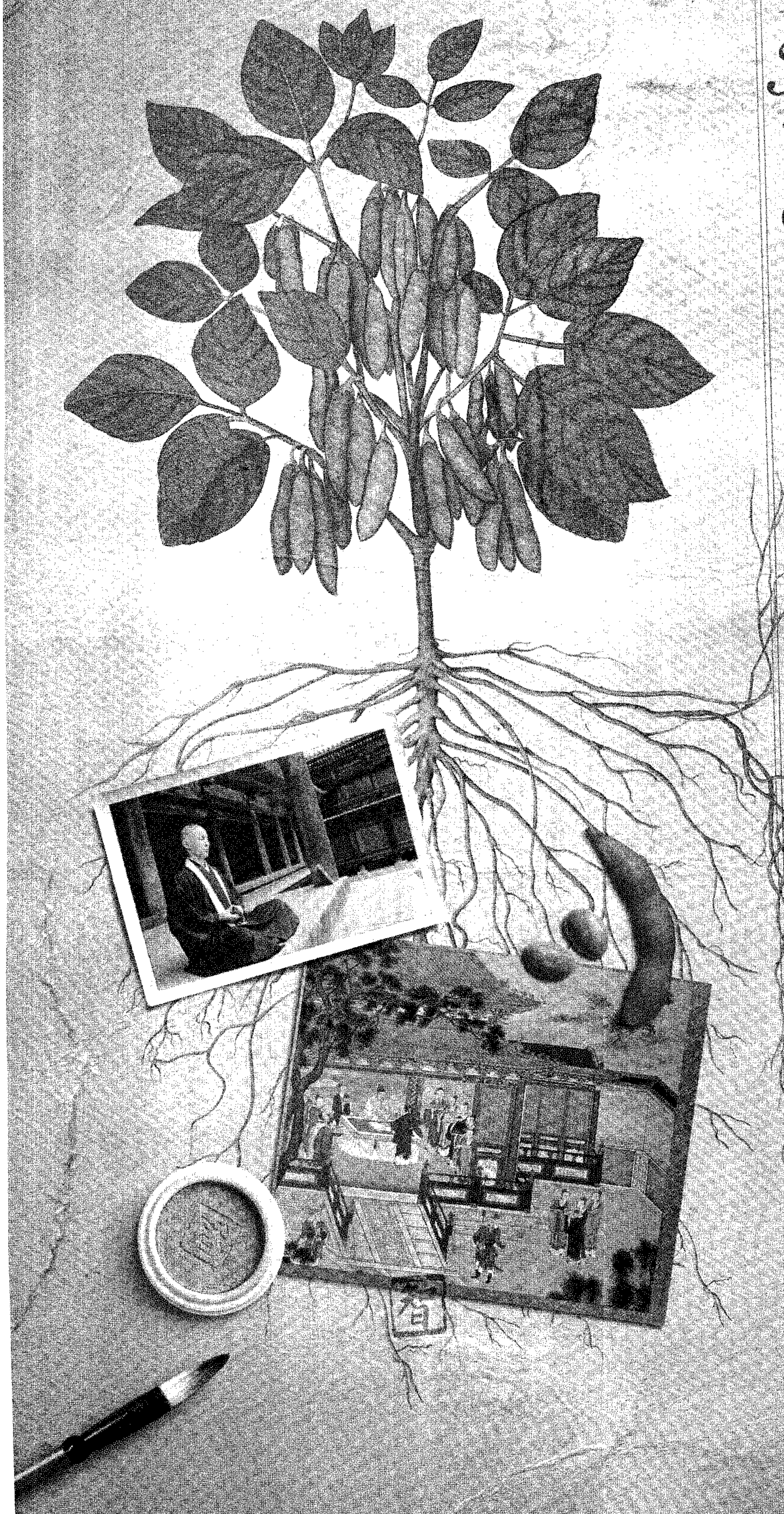

— *Recommended By* —

Nutritionists Buddhists & CHINESE EMPERORS

For over 5,000 years in China, soy has played an important role in food and medicine. So important that in the 28th century BC, Emperor Shen-Nung declared it a sacred plant.

In seventh-century Japan, Buddhist monks advocated eating protein-rich soy because they believed a plant-based diet was healthier for the spirit. The soybean became so popular throughout Japan that it was known as *yama-no-maguro*, or "tuna of the mountains."

So these days, when you hear nutritionists recommend the soybean for its health benefits, know that they're not the first. For thousands of years, all around the world, soy has been an integral part of cultures and diets.

Today, it's this same historic soybean that we take, mix with fruit, and bake to make every SOYJOY®

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